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FOLK TALES
OF
HIMACHAL PRADESH

K. A. SEETHALAKSHMI



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FOLK TALES OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Folklore in the different parts of India is a rich legacy for us. While researches in ancient and modern history have been directed in recent decades more to the succession of kings and political shifts, not much notice has been paid to the culture, complex traditions and social beliefs of the common people. The sociologists have also to pay a good deal of attention to the customs and beliefs of the people and changes therein through the ages. They have rather neglected the study of folklore which is a reliable index to the background of the people. There has always been an easy mobility of folklore through pilgrimages, *melas* and fairs. The wandering minstrels *sadhus* and *fakirs* have also disseminated them. People of the North visiting the temples of the south and vice versa carry their folk-tales, songs, riddles and proverbs with them and there is an inconspicuous integration. The *dharma-salas*, inns and the *Chattis* (places where the pilgrims rest and intermingle) worked as the clearing house for the folk tales, traditional songs and riddles. That is why we find a somewhat common pattern in folk literature of different regions. The same type of folk tale will be found in Kashmir and in Kerala with slight regional variation. These stories were passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth before they came to be reduced to writing.

Folklorists have different approaches to the appreciation of folklore. Max Mueller has interpreted the common pattern in folk literature as evidence of nature-myths. Sir L. Gomme thought that a historical approach is the best for the study of folklore. But Frazer would rather encourage a commonsense approach and to him, old and popular folk literature is mutually interdependent and satisfies the basic curiosities and instincts of man. That folklore is a vital element in a living culture has been underlined in recent years by scholars like Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown.

It is unfortunate that the study of folklore in India is of very recent origin. This is all more regrettable because the

Panchatantra stories which had their origin in Bihar had spread through various channels almost throughout the world. As late as in 1859, T. Benfey had held that there is an unmistakable stamp of Indian origin in most of the fairy tales of Europe. The same stories with different twists or complexes have come back to us through Grimm and Aesop and the retold stories are greedily swallowed by our children. That India has neglected a proper study of the beautiful motifs of our folk tales is seen in the fact that the two large volumes of the dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend published by Messrs Funk and Wagnalls and Company of New York have given a very inadequate reference to India.

What is the secret of the fascination of the folk tales that the old, the young and children are kept enthralled by their recitals ? The same story is often repeated but does not lose its interest. The secret is the satisfaction that our basic curiosity finds in the folk tales. The folk tales through phantasies, make-believe and complacent understanding help primitive man to satisfy his curiosity about the mysteries of the world and particularly the very many inexplicable phenomena of nature around him. We have an element of primitiveness in our mind in spite of the advancement of science around us. Even a scientist finds great delight in the fairy tales of the moon being attacked as the origin of the lunar eclipse. Through the folk tales man exercised his once-limited vision and somehow or other we would like to retain the limited vision even when we have grown up. The advancement in science can never replace the folk tales. On the other hand, folk tales have helped the scientific curiosity of men. In spite of the scientific explanation as to why earthquakes take place, the old, the young and children would still be delighted to be told that the world rests on the hood of a great snake and when the snake is tired with its weight, it shakes the hood and there is an earth-quake. Among the Mundas, an aboriginal tribe in Bihar, there is a wonderful explanation of the constellation Orion. The sword and belt of Orion, the Mundas imagined, form their appropriate likeness to the plough and plough-share which the supreme *Sing Bonga* God first shaped in the heavens and then taught people on aerth

how to use the plough and the plough-share. It is further said in the Munda folk tale that while the *Sing Bonga* was shaping the plough and the plough-share with a chisel and a hammer he observed a dove hatching its eggs at a little distance. The *Sing Bonga* threw his hammer at the dove to bag the game. He missed his mark and the hammer went over the dove's head and hung on a tree. The hammer corresponds to the Pleiads which resemble a hammer. The Aldebaran is the dove and the other stars of the Hyades are the eggs of the dove. Any illiterate Munda boy will unmistakably point out these star groups.

Weather and climate have their own stories and are often connected with particular stages of the crops. The wet season and the hottest month are intimately associated with the ripening of crops or the blossoming of trees or the frequency of dust-storms and stories are woven round them. But nothing is more satisfying as a folk story than the explanation of the phases of the stars, moon and the sun. A Munda would point out the milky way as the *Gai Hora*, i.e. the path of the cows. The *Sing Bonga* god leads his cows every day along this path—the dusky path on the sky is due to the dust raised by the herd. The dust raised by the cows sends down the rains. A story of this type can never fail to sustain its interest in spite of all the scientific explanation of the astral bodies.

The 'why' and 'therefore' of the primitive mind tried to seek an answer in the surrounding animal and plant kingdom. Animals are grouped into different categories according to their intelligence and other habits. The fox is always sly while the cow is gentle. The lion and the tiger have a majestic air while the horse is swift, sleek and intelligent. The slow-going elephant does not forget its attendant nor does he forget a man that teases him. Monkeys are very close to man. The peacock is gay while the crow is shrewd. The tortoise is slow-going but sure-footed. The hare is swift but apt to laze on the road. The primitive mind has enough intelligence to decipher the inherent characteristics of the common animals he meets. Similarly, when he sees a large and shady peepal tree he naturally regards it as the abode of the sylvan god.

The thick jungle with its trees and foliage is known to be frequented by thieves and dacoits. Any solitary hut in the heart of the forest must be associated with someone unscrupulous or uncanny. These ideas are commonly woven into stories and through them the primitive mind seeks to satisfy the eternal why and how of the mind. Folk literature is often crude and even grotesque. The stories of the witches and the ogres come in this category. There is nothing to be surprised at that. They reflect the particular stage of the development of the human mind and also are a projection of the beliefs and fads of the mind. Scientific accuracy should never be looked for in folk tales although folk tales are very good reflex of the social developments of a particular time.

It is enough if the basic ideas regarding the animal and plant kingdom still satisfy that the donkey is dense or stupid and the snake typifies slyness and the fox is deceitful. These ideas repeated in ancient folk tales have stood the test of time and this would show that the primitive mind was not foolish or credulous. The very idea that the folk tales have woven man, nature, animal and plant creation together shows the great flight of imagination and singular development of mind. Introduction of moral lessons or any dogma was not done as an after-thought but came in as a very natural development.

The last source of the folk tales is human society itself. The elemental moorings that are at the root of human society are sought to be illustrated in folk tales. The day to day life of the common man finds its full depiction in the folk tales. Parental love, family happiness, children's adventurous habits, love and fear of the unknown, greed etc. are some of the usual themes of folk tales. The common man yearns for riches and comforts he cannot usually look for. He dreams of riches, princes, kingdoms etc. and finds satisfaction in stories and fantasy. Men love gossip and scandal. Women cannot keep secrets, children will love their parents, a mother-in-law will always think the daughter-in-law needs to be told what to do—these are some of the basic ideas that make up much of our daily life. The folk tales are woven round them and whether fantastic or with a moral undertone they only reflect the daily chores, tears and joys of the common man.

Unknowingly, the folklorists bring in the religious customs, beliefs, food habits, modes of dress, superstitions etc. and thereby leave a picture of the culture-complex of the region and its people. A tribal story does not picture a king riding a white big foaming horse followed by hundreds of other horsemen going for a *shikar*. In a tribal story the Raja will be found cutting the grass and bringing back a stack of it to feed his cows, but a folk tale more current in urban areas will have large palaces, liveried-servants, ministers and courtiers in the king's court. All this only means that the time and the venue of the origin of the stories are widely different. It is here that the sociologists and the anthropologists come in useful. As life is different in rural and urban areas or is chequered with goodness or badness in the world so is folk literature diversified, as it must be, being a replica of life.

It is a pity that these beautiful folk tales in India were almost on the point of disappearance when a few pioneers mostly consisting of foreign missionaries and European scholars looked into them and made compilations in different parts of India. Our present run of grandmothers know very little of them. The professional story-tellers who were very dearly sought after by the old and the young, not to speak of the children, have almost completely disappeared from India. The film industry and the film songs pose a definite threat to folklore.

The Sterling Publishers are to be congratulated for launching the project of publishing a compilation of 20 volumes consisting of the folk tales of different regions. The work has been entrusted to specially selected writers who have an intimate knowledge of their regions. The regional complex of the stories has been sought to be preserved as far as possible. The stories have an elemental involvement about them and they are such as are expected to appeal to the child and its parents. We expect the reader of the folk tales of the particular region to feel after reading the stories, that he has enjoyed a whiff of the air of that area. We want him to have an idea of how Kashmiri folks retire in wintry nights with

him to appreciate the splash of the colours of the sari and the flower that are a must in Tamil Nadu. We want him to know the stories that are behind some of the famous temples in the South such as the Kanjeevaram temple. We want him to know the story regarding the construction of the famous Konarak temple. We want him to enjoy the stories of the heroes of Gujarat, Punjab and Rajasthan in their particular roles. We want the reader to have an idea of the peace and quiet of a hut in the lap of the Kumaon hills. We want the reader to enjoy some of the folk tales of Bengal and Bihar that have found wings in other parts of India and to appreciate the village life with its *Alpana* and *Bratas*. At the same time we want the reader to appreciate the customs and manners of the Santhals, Garos, and the other tribes inhabiting NEFA and Assam.

A set of twenty volumes of Folk Tales of the different regions of India by selected authors is an ambitious programme. Folk Tales have great impact in bringing in national integration of the country. A Keralite will see a pattern of familiarity while reading the folk tales of Bengal, Assam and Kashmir. Maharashtra and Orissa will come nearer to each other through ties of folk tales. The reader will feel that he is at one with his brother or sister elsewhere. A spread of knowledge of the social patterns of the different regions is a pre-requisite for national integration. It can be modestly claimed that this Folk Tales series will be of great help in that direction. The Publishers want to have a miniature India in these 20 volumes.

The authors have to be thanked for their interest in the work. I am sure that they have enjoyed the assignment. It is hoped the books will be found useful and interesting to the public. I have no hesitation in saying that the stories of the different areas do make out a miniature India. It is hoped the reader will enjoy the stories and will come to know more of the region and its people.

PREFACE

Himachal Pradesh, a constituent State of the Indian Union, has a rich share of mountain resorts comparable to any in Kashmir or the central or eastern regions of the lower Himalayan ranges. It is a land of snows, lush green forests, swirling streams, captivating lakes, verdant dales and emerald meadows. The people are simple, sturdy, joy-loving and hardworking. The women love colour and mirth and are as hardworking as the men folk.

Himachal Pradesh is full of hill stations which are refreshingly cool in summer as compared to the plains. The Himalayas are believed to be the abode of gods, demons and fairies. There is a rich legacy of folk tales. Many of the folklore have grown around the deities and demons. The Himalayas are traditionally taken to be 'the abode of Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati. Quite a good number of tales are connected with Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvati and Lord Ganesha.

Himachal Pradesh is known for its colourful fairs which provide healthy recreation and marketing places for a happy and joyous people who love to dance and sing. For them even a small event is big enough to be celebrated.

Most of these fairs are held in commemoration of some events. These events are found in the rich folklore of the Himalayas. Mention of a few such fair is given in the story "Shah Must Ali and Bhiku Shah" and "Pining for Water".

The folk tales project the people—their belief in the supernatural, auspicious hours, and inauspicious moments, their customs, manners, social rites and festivals. In the stories we will see how they live and how they enjoy life. Nature has given them blessings as well as disadvantages and the sturdy people of Himachal live a joyous life in their wonderful surroundings with their drawbacks like droughts, long winters, floods and land slides. They live in Nature. Many folk-stories reflect their social habits and customs.

Personal contacts with old persons, men and women, have helped me in collecting the stories. I have also been greatly helped by some authors who collected some stories before.

K. A. SEETHALAKSHMI

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F O L K T A L E S
O F
H I M A C H A L P R A D E S H

1

RAJA BANA BHAT

LONG long ago Bana Bhat ruled at Kangra. He was an ideal and simple king and he earned his own living by making ropes and selling them at a fair price. He got the name of Bana Bhat as *Bana* means rope and *Bhat* means to distribute.

He had a very faithful and religious wife Mehto. She used to do all the household work and draw water in an earthen pot from a well near the fort early in the morning. During her leisure she used to spin and both she and the king used to wear hand-spun cloth only.

Raja Bana Bhat after completing his court work used to come and stay in a hut near the fort and make ropes.

All his subjects were very happy. They had all praise for the king and the queen because there was no tax and they had plenty to eat.

Kangra used to have a big fair. Men, women and children in very large number came to see the fair, make purchases and sell their wares. They would put on their costliest clothes while visiting the fair. Once the king and the queen also went to see the fair in their usual simple dress. They moved among the men and women freely. There were no body-guards, no servants, no pomp and show. Those who had seen the king before could only recognise him.

One rich merchant and his wife also had come to see the fair. He was said to be the richest man in

Kangra valley. The merchant's wife had a necklace worth nine lakhs of rupees (*navlakha*). People were curious to see the necklace and wherever they went there was a heavy rush.

The king and the queen also met the merchant and his wife. They stood there for a little while and started talking. The merchant's wife talked to the queen. She was very proud of her necklace. She was haughty even when she talked to the queen. The queen felt rather small for not having a necklace. She wanted to have a similar necklace.

The next day when the king returned home after finishing his work he found the queen very sad. This went on for quite a few days. One day the king asked the queen as to why she was sullen and morose.

The queen kept silent for some time and then said, "I am fed up with my wretched life. We are king and queen but we have to toil for our bread the whole day. I have no ornaments to wear and we lead a very miserable life. Unless and until I get a necklace worth 9 lakhs of rupees I will not have any mental peace."

The king was very sorry to hear this. He kept on explaining to her the reasons why they led a simple life but nothing seemed to have any effect on her.

Finally the king taxed his subjects and collected the amount and got the *navlakha* necklace made. The queen wore the necklace in the morning and admired herself in the mirror.

When the king returned from his work he was very tired and had fever. He called the queen and asked for some water. The queen came near the king and found that he had high fever. She sat near him. Again the king asked for water. The queen took the pitcher and tied its neck with a rope and dropped it in the well.

But to her utter surprise the pitcher melted away as soon as it touched the water. She felt very sorry. She realised the reason of her not being able to bring water as she had lost her simplicity. She threw away her necklace and wore a simple dress and took another pitcher. Only then she could fill it up with water. By the time the queen came with water the king had passed away.

The queen wept bitterly and went mad and died a few days after.

Kangra which was once upon a time a prosperous region became poor after the death of such a high-minded but simple king. Even now people of Kangra recall Bana Bhat and think the poverty of the area is due to the queen by losing her simplicity.

2

LABOUR AND GOLD

LORD Shiva and Parvati have many devotees in Himachal Pradesh. There are many temples to Shiva and Parvati. The hill people always refer to Parvati as a goddess of kindness.

One day while Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati were on their journey back to their abode, goddess Parvati said to Shiva, "Lord ! You are very cruel and seldom take pity on the suffering human beings. You ignore their prayers. There are many people on earth who are not even getting enough to eat."

Lord Shiva on hearing her said, "What has happened now? Who is suffering ?"

Goddess Parvati did not let go the opportunity. She pointed out a beggar on the ground and said that he was very poor and something should be done to him.

Lord Shiva explained to her in many ways and said that many men would be suffering like that on earth. This was the result of *karma* (action) and that they were all reaping the fruits of their own actions either in this life or in the past.

But goddess Parvati was rather adamant and wanted that the beggar should be helped. Lord Shiva then dropped a golden brick on the beggar's way.

The beggar had a bag on his shoulder. He was walking back home brooding over his poverty. He thought that if he did not die before he got old then his own eyes might deceive him. He might have to walk without his eyes. He wanted to experiment how he

would manage as a blind man. He started walking with his eyes closed and so passed the golden brick without seeing it.

Goddess Parvati was watchful. She was very disappointed when the beggar passed the golden brick without noticing it.

Lord Shiva with a winking in his eyes told Parvati, "So you see, your poor beggar did not even look at the golden brick. So do many opportunities flit by a man without being picked up. It is only good actions that bring a reward. Do you realise that ?" Goddess Parvati nodded although in her heart of hearts she had great pity for the beggar.

3

PINKATTA PANDEY

THIS is the story of a poor brahmin and how he helped himself to live happily in comfort in the palace of the king. Once upon a time there was a poor brahmin who had no land of his own. His only job was to beg. He used to go round begging and could collect some flour and vegetables by the end of the day. He used to give the flour and vegetables to his wife. His wife was very clever. She used to make eight *chapatis* with the flour (chapatis are made by kneading flour with water and baking it over the pan). Four chapatis she will keep in a corner for eating afterwards and out of the rest four she used to serve two to her husband and two she used to eat herself. This was their daily routine.

The brahmin was very greedy. He thought of bringing more flour so that he could get more chapatis. The next morning he woke up early and went round begging a longer way and brought more flour. The brahmin was dreaming that he would be getting more chapatis. But his wife would always make eight chapatis only. The brahmin thought of a plan. One day instead of going for begging he hid himself in a corner of the house. He started watching his wife's actions. The brahmin's wife as usual made eight chapatis. She hid four chapatis in the corner and the other four she kept in the open. The brahmin got up and quietly went out. He returned home early. The brahmin's wife on seeing him greeted him and pulled down her veil. She started serving food to him. When she put two chapatis on the brahmin's *thali* (plate) his anger knew no bounds. The brahmin said, "Four chapatis are here and where are the other four ? If you

do not tell me I shall curse you." The brahmin's wife got puzzled. She thought her husband had become a god or got some supernatural power. She had no other way out than to give out her secret. She quickly fell at her husband's feet. She brought out the four chapatis which she had hidden. The brahmin said to his wife, "Look here, do not start announcing to people that I have got the supernatural power of making right guesses. If you say so people will start troubling us with all sorts of odd questions."

The brahmin's wife used to get up quite late in the morning. But the day after this incident she got up very early and went near the village tap to fill her pitchers with water. At the tap many old and young ladies used to come to fill their pitchers too. That was a common place for gossip. When the brahmin's wife reached there she saw her friend, Chandrika. She called her aside and said, "Chandrika, I am going to let out a secret to you. You are a fast friend of mine and that is why I am telling you this. My husband has attained godhood. Please do not tell this to anybody. He can make right guesses."

The brahmin's wife told this by turn to all her friends. This news spread like wild fire throughout the village.

One day the queen lost her diamond necklace. The police were engaged to search the necklace. But it was of no avail. The brahmin's fame had even reached the king's ears. He sent for the brahmin, gave him plateful of *ladoos* (sweets) and said, "The queen has lost her necklace. Can you tell me where it has gone ? I will suitably reward you if you can trace it."

The brahmin started perspiring heavily and did not know what to say. But he gathered courage and said, "Your Majesty ! Tomorrow is Friday and day after tomorrow is Saturday. Hence it is not possible to search. I will do it after Saturday has passed."

Before the brahmin could finish the sentence the king said, "If you are capable of finding out the necklace you will be made a minister in the court but if you fail you will be hanged to death."

The brahmin asked for three days to predict and went home. He told everything to his wife. His wife was very much upset. The brahmin went and stretched himself on a bed. He wanted to sleep but he could not. He went on changing sides. Two days thus passed and the brahmin was very much worried. On the night of the second day he started singing thus, "*nindiya*, please come today, tomorrow you are going to die." (*nindiya* means sleep).

The maid servant of the queen who had stolen the queen's necklace wanted to find out what plan was being made by the brahmin to find out the thief. She quietly stepped into the brahmin's house and had concealed herself. Her name too was *Nindiya*. When she heard her name being called out by the brahmin (who was only inviting sleep at that time) she was very much upset. She came out of her hiding corner and quickly fell at the feet of the brahmin and said, "I am very sorry. I will never steal in future. Please excuse me." The brahmin was very happy. He pardoned her. The next morning he went to the court. He posed in such a way as if he had become an *Avatar* (an incarnation) of god. He took some water in his hand and said, "The thief who has stolen the queen's necklace is now working in the palace. She must immediately present herself here."

Nindiya quickly came to the court of the king and she pleaded guilty quietly. She made over the necklace. She begged to be pardoned. The brahmin spoke to the king that the maid-servant should be pardoned. The king agreed.

From now the brahmin was much respected by the king and became his favourite. He started living comfortably in the palace. The ministers did not like

all this. They wanted to poison the ears of the king. Few days passed like this. One day a minister said, "Guess what is in my hand. If you are not capable of answering my question correctly then you will be hanged."

The brahmin thought that his time has come and said, "Oh ! *Pinkatta*, you are now going to die."

Hearing this the minister fell at his feet and opened his fist. The insect flew away. The minister had actually an insect named *Pinkatta* inside his hand and the name of the brahmin was also *Pinkatta*.

Pinkatta Pandey, the brahmin, was not troubled again and lived happily thereafter with his wife.

4

RESULT OF AN ACT OF KINDNESS

IN times of yore at (Garhwal) there was a king who had two wives. The first wife had six sons and the second wife had only one son. The six sons of the first wife loved one another and used to play together. But they never took the second wife's son as their playmate. That boy felt very lonely.

One day, however, they all went out for a walk and the seventh brother also accompanied. They reached a long stretch of a beautiful meadow with green grass and bright and sweet smelling flowers. They had never seen such a beautiful plot of land before. They started discussing as to how best they could utilise the plot of land. One said that it could be used for a horse race course, the second one held that it could be used as a field for the plough and so on. When the turn for the seventh brother came he said, "I would like to establish a town at this beautiful place under my name."

When the brothers heard this they were full of jealousy and they laughed merrily. They caught hold of him, and tied him round a tree with a strong piece of rope. They went back home. When they reached home their stepmother asked, "Where have you left your youngest brother?" They said that he was ruling over his own kingdom.

The youngest prince who was tied round the tree was hungry and thirsty. Suddenly an idea flashed across his mind. Once when he was very young many rats had come to his father's kingdom. These rats were a big nuisance. They used to eat away the foodgrains in the fields and stored in the households. The king and his subjects were very sad. The king had ordered that

each and every rat in his kingdom should be killed. The youngest prince then had saved one rat. The rat was so pleased at that time that he promised to help the prince when the need arose. The prince who was at this time in extreme agony remembered that favourite rat. As soon as he thought of it, lo, the rat along with his friends came there. The rat was asked to set him free. The rats gnawed at the rope and freed the prince.

The prince had no mind to go back home. He started walking ahead. When it became dark he slept under a peepal tree. After some time Lord Shiva and his consort Parvati passed that way. The goddess Parvati took pity on the prince. She said to her husband, "Look ! How unfortunate that prince is ? Why do you not bless him and shower some good luck on him ?" Lord Shiva said, "Why do you start worrying for each and every individual ? He is reaping the results of his own actions." Goddess Parvati was very insistent and said something must be done to the boy. On the repeated appeal at last Lord Shiva yielded and said, "To-night a bird will come and sit on this tree. If the prince shoots the bird down and rips it open he will find a ring. That ring will bring good luck to him."

The prince who was half asleep heard all this. At mid-night the bird came. The prince quickly shot it down and ripped open its stomach and found the ring. He took the ring and placing it on the ground prayed to God and wished that there should be a magnificent town in his name. Four hefty men appeared and bowed and said they were there to build the town. They built a big palace and many attractive houses and shops. The prince started living there. The town became very prosperous in no time.

The prince's six brothers were eager to know what had happened to their brother. They sent their messengers. Some of the messengers brought the message that the prince was now living in a beautiful palace in

a prosperous town. No sooner the brothers heard this their anger and jealousy knew no bounds. They sent their most faithful woman messenger. This messenger knew all the tricks. She went to the town dressed as a man. She stayed in the town for sometime and found out everything about the town.

She hit upon a plan. She dressed like a woman and went to the palace. She went straight to the prince's wife. The lady-messenger told the prince's wife that she was her niece. The prince's wife, however, could not recollect her having a niece. She told the lady-messenger that she never had a niece. The lady-messenger said, "Well, now that you have become a queen why should you remember your poor relations?" The prince's wife had no other way out. She begged to be excused and welcomed her as a guest. The lady-messenger stayed in the palace and became a good friend of the prince's wife. One day the lady-messenger enquired of the prince's wife how the town came into being.

The prince's wife told the lady-messenger whom she took as a genuine niece that she herself did not know how the palace came into being. She promised the lady-messenger to let her know everything after verifying it from her husband. The lady-messenger who was very cunning said, "You do not ask for the information straightforward as to how the palace came into being. You pretend that you are seriously ill and that you are going to die shortly. When your husband asks you regarding your welfare, you just tell him that you are very much worried about answering God in heaven regarding the coming into existence of the palace. That will make him give you the information."

The prince's wife sat in a corner of a room with dishevelled hair and pretended as if she was very ill. When the prince returned and saw her he was very much perturbed. The prince's wife proceeded as

planned before. The prince then told her that the palace came into existence due to a ring he had found.

The lady-messenger heard all this from the other room. The prince's wife also told her the secret regarding the ring to her. The lady-messenger said one day, "Auntie ! men are never to be trusted. You take the ring from your husband and keep it with you. Otherwise somebody might snatch it away from him."

The prince's wife agreed and somehow managed to get it from her husband. The lady-messenger stole the ring during the night and gave it to the six brothers. The eldest brother kept it in a secret place.

The moment the ring disappeared the whole magic town vanished. The prince again found himself tied round a tree. His sorrow knew no limits. He again thought of the rat. The rat came. The prince narrated his story of distress to the rat.

The rat started its enquiries. He found out that the ring was with the eldest brother. During night the eldest brother used to keep it in between the teeth. The rat quietly entered the bed room one night and put his tail inside his nose. There was a big sneeze and the ring fell down. The rat ran away with the ring. The rat gave the ring back to the youngest brother. The youngest brother once again kept the ring on the ground and prayed and prayed. The town again came up with a big palace. He lived in the palace peacefully thereafter and made the rat his minister.

5

THE CHATAKA'S CRY FOR WATER

IN the hot month of Chait corresponding to March we here the shrill cry of a chataka bird and the cry is associated with the bird pining for water. There is a touching story of how the chataka bird came.

There was a family consisting of only three persons —an old woman, her daughter and daughter-in-law. Both the daughter and daughter-in-law had one pair of bullocks each. They went to the field driving their bullocks. The bullocks started ploughing the fields. It became noon time. The sun blazed straight on their heads. They felt very tired. Only a small portion of the field had been ploughed. The remaining portion of the field was still to be ploughed. The bullocks were also very tired and they refused to move.

Suddenly there was the sound of beating of drums on the hillock. There was going to be a *puja* and also a fair was to be held. On hearing the beating of drums and the sound of the conch the daughter was tempted to go to the fair. Both of them left the bullocks on the fields and came back to the mother.

The daughter requested her mother to allow her to go to the fair. At first her mother did not agree but later on she agreed on one condition only. The condition was that she should give water to her bullocks first. The old lady told both her daughter and daughter-in-law, "Whosoever among you brings her bullocks first after giving water will be given *Kheer*.*"

* *Kheer*—*Kheer* is prepared by boiling rice in creamy milk. Sugar is added according to taste.

They went back to the field and tried to take the bullocks to the pond for letting them drink. The bullocks were obstinate and though they were thirsty they would not go.

The daughter gave up the attempt and drove her pair of bullocks home. The mother thought she had brought them after giving them water and gave her all the *Kheer* to eat. The daughter went away to the fair.

The daughter-in-law, somehow, managed to drive her bullocks to the pond. She came back quite an hour after. The mother-in-law rebuked her for the delay. Being a good-natured girl she did not tell the mother what the daughter had done.

That night the thirsty bullocks of the daughter died at the cowshed because of thirst. Before dying they cursed that the daughter will become a thirsty bird after death and would always thirst for water. Sometime after the daughter died and became a chataka bird. A chataka bird does not drink water from the ground but only drinks the rain water. In the summer you always hear her plaintive screeches for water.

6

THE GREEDY MERCHANT AND HIS WIFE

IT was a cold winter night with a heavy shower. Goddess Lakshmi, somehow, felt she should visit the earth with her husband and see for themselves how the devotees were faring. They descended to the world in the disguise of an old decrepit couple. They came down to a village on the hilly slopes flanked by tall trees and jungle bushes.

They entered a rich merchant's house. The merchant thought they must have come to stay and have a good time. He shouted at them and drove them away. The old couple did not excite his sympathy.

Just by the side of the merchant's house there was a poor man's hut. The old couple then knocked at the door of this hut. Lado, the poor man's wife opened the door, brought a hurricane lamp and requested them to sit on a broken cot. There were only two broken cots in their house. Both the god and the goddess were absolutely drenched. She gave them some old mended clothes to change and gave some spinach that grows wild on the hill slopes and coarse chapati made of *bajra* flour. Lado's husband came in with a load on his head. Seeing the guests he was very happy. After taking the food both the god and the goddess slept on the cot. Lado and her husband slept on the floor. Both the god and the goddess took leave in the dawn and were ready to go. At that time Lado quickly made two chapatis of gram flour and gave them with some salt and jungle plums.

While leaving, goddess Lakshmi told Lado that whatever she touched that day will always remain full.

After they left Lado thought of cleaning the vessels in which vegetable was cooked the previous night. But to her utter surprise she found the vessel was full of gold-coins. She quickly emptied the vessel into a pot but it again became full of gold coins. This went on and they became rich. Lado's husband bought a new house and opened a cloth shop in the heart of the village and lived very happily with that money. Their neighbour, the merchant, came to know about the change of luck of the poor couple and felt curious. He called them and asked them what had happened. Lado who was an innocent and un-sophisticated woman told everything as had happened.

The merchant cursed his luck for having turned out the old couple. He was always thinking if they would come again. Now the god and the goddess came to know about it. They again came down to the earth on a rainy day in the garb of beggars and knocked at their door. The merchant and his wife were actually waiting for such a day. The lady opened the door, and brought them in and gave them cots to sit on. She also gave some old mended clothes for a change of dress. Then she gave them the same *sag* and some chapatis made of *bajra* flour. The merchant and his wife made them sleep on a cot and they themselves slept on the floor. In the morning when they were ready to leave the merchant's wife gave them some chapatis made of gram flour. She followed all that had been done previously without feeling any joy in it.

The goddess said, "Since you took pity on us and gave us food and shelter so I wish that whatever work you start today will continue and never be over the whole day."

No sooner had they left than both the merchant and his wife started quarrelling. The quarrel was on the point as to who would open the pot in which vegetable was cooked the previous night. At last when they

opened it some of the vegetable came out of the pot and fell on the floor and the merchant's wife started cleaning the floor. Again some more vegetable came out and she cleaned again and again. This went on for the whole day. By the end of the day both of them were very tired. They thus reaped the results of their greed and selfishness.

7

A FOOLISH MAN

THREE was a foolish man who was once going to his father-in-law's place. He just learnt to say "Yes" and "No" and was told that he should not utter any other word. On being asked what he should say to those going on the road he was told that he should only say "*Namaskar*". *Namaskar* is just a way of respectful greeting.

The foolish man started on his journey. He saw a hunter on his way. The hunter had spread his net to catch sparrows. When the birds were just sitting on his net the fool shouted at the top of his voice *Namaskar*. All the birds flew away and he got a good thrashing. The fool then asked him why he was beaten and what should he say to others. The hunter then said, "When you go you keep on saying 'please keep coming.'"

The fool again started on his way. He was met by a group of thieves. He said, "Please keep coming." When the thieves heard this, they gave him a good beating thinking that he was taunting them. The fool innocently asked them what he should say to others. The thieves said, "Say, keep on bringing and collecting them." The fool again started on his journey. On his way he saw four men carrying a corpse. They heard the fool saying, "Keep on bringing and collecting them." Their anger knew no bounds. They beat him black and blue. The fool started weeping and amidst sighs asked them what he should now say. They told him to say, "This should never happen." The fool went on his journey repeating the words, "This should never happen."

There was a very big marriage procession passing that way. All were very happy. The bridegroom was

very gorgeously dressed. Suddenly when they heard the fool saying "This should never happen." they gave him a good beating. The fool had almost reached his in-law's place. The mother-in-law on seeing him said, "Are you all right ?"

The fool said, "Yes."

She then asked, "Is my daughter well ?"

The fool said, "No."

"Is she suffering from fever ?", the mother-in-law asked.

"Yes" said the fool.

"Is she not well now ?" asked the mother-in-law.

"No" said the fool.

When the mother-in-law heard such short answer in yes and no she started suspecting. She quickly asked, "Is she dead ?"

"Yes" said the fool.

The mother-in-law started howling out of grief and wept bitterly. The neighbours collected in front of



their house. When they heard this, they also started lamenting.

The news soon reached the ears of the fool's parents. They came to know what had happened due to their son's foolishness. They reached the spot accompanied by their daughter-in-law. When the daughter-in-law saw her parents in such a condition she quickly hugged them. When they saw their daughter their happiness knew no bounds. The fool, his wife and their parents all started towards their home and lived happily thereafter. No one worried the fool any more.

8

MAMA

MAMA is the maternal uncle. A guest in Himachal is also usually called Mama and given proper respect as an elder relative.

At Kumaon village there was a Garhwali family consisting of the husband, wife and their only young son. The husband and wife once had a bitter quarrel as to who works harder. The wife said that as she had to do all the domestic chores, fetch water from the distant rivulet, attend the village fair once a week about eight miles away, keep food ready and the house clean she worked much harder than the husband. The husband laughed and tauntingly remarked the wife's work was very light in comparison to his. He mentioned that he had to look after the cattle, the field and grow crops etc. There was no end to the quarrel and they stopped talking to each other. This went on for months.

Once upon a time a traveller going through the village thought of passing his night at their house. He called out for the man in the house. The lady of the house took him to be a friend of her husband and made him comfortable. The husband had gone out on some work. The son started chatting with the guest and became very friendly with him. He asked the guest who he was. The traveller, who was absolutely a stranger, paused for a while and said that he was his "mama". When the boy heard that he went and informed his mother about it. His mother who had no maternal uncle of own took the guest to be her husband's uncle and prepared a grand dinner.

When the husband returned home, he saw the guest. He asked his son who he was. On being told that he

was "mama" he thought that the guest must be his wife's uncle.

At night they made him comfortable and went to sleep in the other room. The guest woke up early in the morning. He did not wait for his host and left the house.

In the morning when the host woke up he went to the guest's room to enquire whether he was quite comfortable at night. To his utter surprise he found the room empty. He wanted to tease his wife as her uncle was so discourteous and did not even wait to thank his host or hostess. As they were not talking to each other he called his son and said, "Go and tell your mother that her uncle has gone away without bidding good-bye." On hearing him the wife came out and blurted out, "Is this the way you should abuse me? He is your uncle and not mine." When the husband heard this he asked, "Was not he your uncle?" When they came to know that the guest was not related to anybody, they both broke out in a hearty laughter at their own folly. The husband started cursing the guest as he had them to believe about a relationship and they had spent a good bit of money in giving him a sumptuous dinner. The wife, however, told the husband that a guest is like a god and in this case the guest had made them talk to each other after months.

9

KESHVA, THE GOD

IN times of yore at Kangra there was a king named Giri Raj. He had two wives named Sarla and Vimla. They were sisters. None of the queens had any children. They did all kinds of Pooja and fasting. They fed the brahmins, poor people etc. but to no use. They were not blessed with any children.

Near the thick forest of Kangra valley there was a priest named Durga Das. Durga Das was a far-famed *Mahatma* (a saint). Both Sarla and Vimla decided to visit the Mahatma and receive his blessings.

The next morning Sarla went to the Mahatma's cottage and gave him the gifts and told him her sad story. The Mahatma felt very sad for her. He sympathised with her and told her to come the next day. He said that he would give her a fruit and on eating it she would be blessed with a son.

Sarla returned home and told everything to her sister, Vimla. Vimla then thought that if her sister gets a child then she alone would be respected and nobody will even look at her. Vimla quickly put on Sarla's dress and went to the Mahatma's cottage. The Mahatma on seeing her gave her the fruit and blessed her.

The next morning Sarla reached the Mahatma's cottage. When the Mahatma saw her he asked her what else she wanted. Sarla then said that she had come to collect the fruit. The Mahatma then said that he had given the fruit to another lady who told him that her name was Sarla.

It took no time for Sarla to understand that the second lady must be her sister Vimla. Sarla then told the Mahatma that she had a sister named Vimla and that both of them had been married to the king, Giri Raj.

The Mahatma gave another fruit to Sarla and blessed her. Sarla came back home and ate half the fruit and gave the other half to the mare.

After some time Sarla gave birth to a son and Vimla gave birth to a daughter. The son was named as Keshva and the daughter was named as Suhasini. The mare also gave birth to a fine colt. The mare and Keshva became very friendly. Keshva was once told by his friends that in a far off place there was a beautiful girl and that if he could get her, she could become his ideal wife. Keshva wanted to marry the girl.

He started on his journey in search of the girl. He took the colt along with him. At last he discovered the girl in a magic country. The girl was also a magician. Keshva started living in that palace. The girl used to convert him in the form of a frog during day and during night made him assume his own form.

Keshva lived there for a long time. Meanwhile his father Giri Raj had died. The enemies had started attacking the country. A cheat once came to Giri Raj's palace and said that he was Keshva. The gate keeper who was blind did not allow him to enter the palace. The gate keeper told the stranger that a Mahatma had told him that he would regain his eyesight if Keshva returned home. Until now Suhasini was managing the work. But when there were many disturbances she got fed up. She decided to send a messenger to search for her brother Keshva. She gave a letter to the messenger for her brother and sent him.

The messenger reached the palace where Keshva was living. The messenger handed over the letter to

Keshva. On reading the letter Keshva decided to come back to his kingdom. He returned home along with the messenger and the man. No sooner had he entered the palace than the sight of the eyes of the gate keeper were restored. He thanked his master.

Then there was a severe fight between Keshva and his enemies. Single-handed Keshva fought them. Keshva was beheaded but because of God's blessing he went on fighting without his head. The enemies were defeated. His head was restored and Keshva became the ruler again. His kingdom became a prosperous tract with smiling crops and contented people. Keshva ruled for decades.

Keshva is still worshipped far and wide throughout Kangra. The idol of Keshva has been installed in many temples. Keshva is regarded as an incarnation. The villagers still recount the story of the great fight he gave though beheaded, to his enemies only because he was good and virtuous.

10

THE DACOIT WHO WAS MORE CLEVER

ONCE upon a time in the jungles of Himachal there was a notorious dacoit. Once the dacoit went to a distant big village where he was not known and visited the house of a rich trader. The trader was celebrating the marriage of his only son with all pomp and show. He had invited a large number of persons. A number of well known cooks had been engaged and the kitchen was set up behind the cow-shed.

The dacoit went near the cowshed. He told the head cook that he was the cousin of the businessman and he had come to help the cooks. The Head Cook assigned him the work of making *ladoos*.

The dacoit quickly made two different kinds of *ladoos*. He made some real *ladoos* of *Bundi* (Gram flour paste is made with water and this is then cooked in oil in the shape of small balls which is made with the help of a ladle having holes. This is called *Bundi Ladoo* is made out of this) and the others with cowdung covered with a small quantity of *bundis*. He hid the basketful of real *ladoos* and kept the other inside the store (*Bhandar*).

He told the store in-charge that he was the cousin of the cook and that the cook wanted a bottle of honey and a napkin. Taking these two things he came near the cook and told him that his uncle had asked him to give the honey bottle to the doctor and while going there he will throw the cowdung also as the smell of the cowdung from the cowshed was noxious. With this he took the basketful of good *ladoos* and covered it with the napkin and spread a little cowdung over it and took the honey bottle in the other hand and went homewards.

Another dacoit named Sher Singh saw him and wanted to cheat him. Sher Singh followed him. When Sher Singh came very near the dacoit asked Sher Singh who he was. Sher Singh gave out he was a coolie. The first dacoit engaged him and wanted him carry his stuff to his place. The coolie agreed.

Sher Singh enquired what the basket contained. The first dacoit who imagined himself to be very clever told Sher Singh that it contained seeds. Sher Singh asked, "Pray tell me what seeds are they?" The dacoit told him that they were seeds of honey which are bees. Sher Singh took the bottle of honey also from his hand and started walking very fast. When he was asked why he walked so fast he told him that when there was some load on his head he found it more convenient to walk fast. The first dacoit allowed him to go but asked him to stop at a famous betel shop at the end of the bridge on the Gomati river and wait for him.

The first dacoit had warned him that the bottle was full of poison and the basket was full of bees and that they should never be opened.

When Sher Singh covered a considerable distance he climbed a hillock and got very tired. He sat under the shade of a big banian tree and out of curiosity opened the basket and found the *ladoos*. He ate away nearly three-fourths of the *ladoos*. The rest of the *ladoos* he packed in leaves and kept them in the hole of a big tree and started walking. He came to the betel shop where the dacoit had asked him to wait. He thought of a plan. He sat there and started weeping bitterly. People gathered round him and asked him why he was weeping.

He told them that he was carrying a load of seeds of honey to his master's place. He knew that the basket had become very light and saw that all the seeds had flown away one by one. He was weeping because his master would take him to task for losing the seeds of

honey. They were all surprised to hear that honey could have seeds. He explained the seeds were bees. Meanwhile the dacoit reached the place and on seeing all this he asked Sher Singh what actually had happened. Sher Sing started weeping again and told him that one by one the bees had flown away. He begged to be pardoned for that. The dacoit was very angry and the more so as he had been caught by his own words. He abused Sher Singh for the loss.

Sher Singh showed he was very repentant. "Sir," he said, "I have been foolish enough and put you to great loss. Pray, do not abuse me any more. I am going to drink the poison in the bottle as you said and put an end to my life." With these words Sher Singh quickly unscrewed the bottle and drank away the honey.

The first dacoit found he had been caught in the web of his own ruse and made friends with Sher Singh.

Thereafter the two dacoits lived together.

11

BHAGDEO—THE WARRIOR

IN times of yore there was a Prince named Koku Rawat in Kokukot. He had seven queens, but no son. He, therefore, married another woman named Kunjavati. Kunjavati was a lady of surpassing beauty. The Raja loved her dearly. After some time Kunjavati was going to have a child and she was, somehow, very keen to eat venison and requested Koku to procure it for her. Koku Rawat offered her fish or fowls or meat of goat but the queen wanted venison only. At last the king started on a hunting expedition. He collected a large number of men and also invited his own nephew, Khim Singh, to accompany him. Everybody tried to dissuade the king from going but the king had his way. For three continuous days they searched the forest but they could not find even a single deer. On the fourth day the king saw a deer. He ordered his men to surround the deer. But to the amazement of all, the deer jumped over the king's head and escaped. The king chased the deer and reached a place called Gangoli Hat. At Gangoli Hat there was a warrior named Gauria. Gauria was eighty years old. He had seven sons and fourteen grandsons. The deer ran and sat in the lap of Gauria. In the meanwhile Koku along with his men reached there and demanded the deer from Gauria. Gauria out of compassion for the deer refused to part with the deer and said the deer had sought his protection.

The king got very angry and a fierce battle took place between them. In the fight Gauria cut Koku's head with his dagger. All Koku's men were killed in the battle except Khim Singh who managed to escape. Khim Singh went back home and informed Kunjavati

of the death of her husband. Kunjavati was beside her with sorrow but felt helpless.

She gave birth to a son after sometime. The child was given the name of Ransura Bhagdeo. Ransura Bhagdeo was a precocious child. When he was hardly twelve years old he asked his mother as to who was his father. Kunjavati tried to give evasive replies. But Ransura Bhagdeo kept on pressing his mother. At last she gave out that his father had been killed by Gauria.

Ransura Bhagdeo was full of rage and wanted to take revenge against Gauria. He insisted his mother to give him permission to go and fight with the enemy. At last his mother had to give him permission. Bhagdeo had a step-sister by name Ransula. Ransula possessed extraordinary strength. One day she took nine *Lons* (about eight maunds) of wheat to grind at a watermill of Gangoli village. The water channel of the mill also irrigated the fields of Gauria Gangola. Ransula diverted the water channel into the mill. The fields of Gauria became dry. When Gauria saw this he went near the mill and found Ransula. He abused her for doing so. Ransula got wild and tied his hands and feet round the wheel of the mill.

Next morning when Gauria's sons did not find their father, they went out to search for him. They at last found him tied round the mill. They set him free and caught hold of Ransula and brought her home.

When Bhagdeo heard about it he took a vow to take revenge. Bhagdeo started for Gangoli Hat. After reaching the village he started destroying the crops of the fields of Gauria. On seeing this Gauria ordered one Champhu Hurkia to go and find out who the man was. Champhu went to the fields and asked Bhagdeo who he was. Bhagdeo gave out who he was. On hearing it Champhu fell at his feet and said, "Sir, I am your family bard. After your father's death I have been made a

prisoner of war. Gauria also took your father's horse and hounds. I am now at your service. You kindly take your horse and hounds and face your enemy." So saying Champhu took Bhagdeo to the stable, The horse at once recognised his master's son and yearned to serve him. Bhagdeo also took his hounds and other weapons.

Bhagdeo then attacked Gauria. All the seven sons of Gauria came out and fought. Bhagdeo killed all of them and then went and dug up the head of his father and brought it home. He then duly performed the funeral rites. He became the ruler of that area and maintained peace and prosperity for years. Villagers still talk of Bhagdeo's valour and greatness of heart.

12

THREE BROTHERS

ONCE upon a time there were three brothers. Their property consisted of only one pear tree. Naturally they valued this tree very highly. One brother used to keep a watch while the other two went to work in the fields. Even after working very hard they could not get enough to eat. Once a kind-hearted fairy passed that way. She took pity on them and thought of helping them. She disguised herself as a beggar and begged. The eldest brother quickly gave his share of pears to her. The second day also she came. At that time the second brother was there. He gave his share. The third day again she repeated her visit and the third brother gave his share also. There was not a single pear left on that tree.

The next morning all the three brothers got ready to go to the fields. Suddenly the fairy came and stood in front of them and told them that it was she who had come before to beg and now she wanted to give them plenty to enjoy. She told them that she was very pleased by their kindness.

She led them through a thick forest. There was a river flowing by. She stopped them and asked the eldest brother to ask for a boon. The eldest brother did not think for a long time and as he was very thirsty he said, "I wish that the whole river turns into *Sharbat* (a sweet soft drink). The fairy waved her magic wand and the river was converted into real *Sharbat*. The fairy said to the eldest brother, "Your wish is fulfilled. Make use of it carefully."

She proceeded ahead with the other two brothers. They came across a big field with many pigeons. The

fairy stopped and asked the second brother to ask for a boon. The second brother thought for a little while and said, "I wish to become a peasant and all these pigeons to be converted into sheep." The fairy waved her magic wand and, lo, the change was there as desired by him.

She then proceeded along with the youngest brother. On the way she asked him what his wish was. He told her that he wanted to marry a princess.

The fairy took him to a palace and told the king that there was one suitor for the princess. She came to know that there were already two more suitors. The fairy kept a basketful of berries in the court where as the other suitors had brought with them costly jewels and diamonds etc. The king never wanted to give his daughter to the poor boy. But the princess wanted to marry him. The king was in a fix. The fairy took the situation into her hand. She said, "O king ! I give you one suggestion. You give one sapling of grape to each one of them and ask them to plant it. The planter of the sapling that bears fruit within three days be chosen for the princess." The king was highly pleased with this suggestion and asked them to do accordingly.

All the three suitors planted the saplings. But none bore any fruit for two days. On the third day they saw a beautiful grape on the plant planted by the youngest brother. The king was forced to give his daughter in marriage to him. They started living in a small cottage in the jungle.

The fairy came after a year in the form of a beggar and begged for a glass of *Sharbat* from the eldest brother. He refused and told her that he is not supposed to give alms to beggars. No sooner she turned her back than the river was no longer a river of *Sharbat* but of plain water. The eldest brother realized his mistake and started weeping and begging. But the fairy said, "Persons who are not capable of availing of a thing should not get it." Then she went near the second brother and

begged for food. The second brother refused to give her food. Suddenly the sheep were changed into pigeons and he realized his mistake. He begged the fairy to pardon him but she said, "You should always help others." So saying she disappeared.

When she entered the youngest brother's hut she found both of them taking their food. When he saw the old lady he quickly remembered her and requested her to take food with them. She shared the food with them and felt very happy. She moved her magic wand and the cottage was converted into a large palace with beautiful furniture. Both of them lived thereafter peacefully for a long time.

13

FIVE PAKORAS

PAKORA is a tasty snack. It is made of fried cut vegetables with a paste of gram flour mixed with chilli powder, salt and asafoetida.

There was a very small village named Ramolihat. There were only six families in the village. One family consisted of an old lady and her husband. Both were about seventy years old. The old lady and her husband used to talk the whole day. They were a loving couple.

It was a very cold day, and it had drizzled the whole day.

The old man told his wife, "Have we got gram flour in the house ?" The old lady told him that there was a little of gram flour at the bottom of the container.

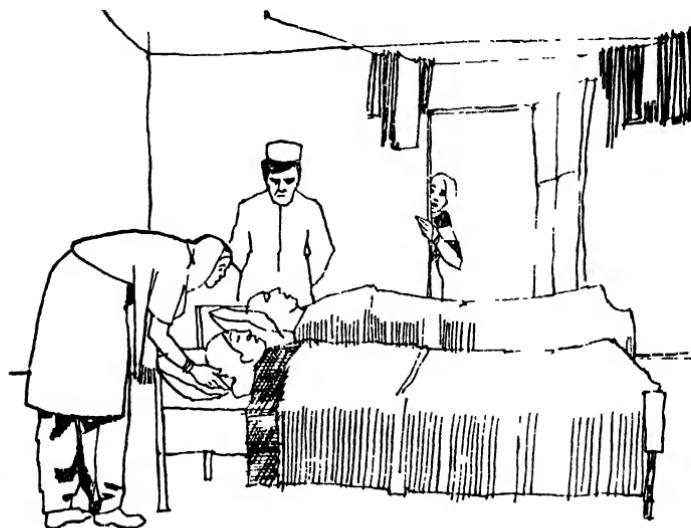
The old man said that he had a mind to eat *pakoras* that day.

The old lady made pakoras with the gram flour. The old man said, "You know the tradition in the village. Whenever any good eatable is made it is to be distributed among all the families. So we have to distribute these pakoras."

The old lady was in a fix. She saw that there were only five pakoras. It was not possible to distribute them. She told her husband that she would distribute pakoras some other time to the villagers.

The old man agreed. The old lady kept three pakoras on her husband's plate and two she kept for herself. The old man did not want to take the bigger share. The old lady also did not want to eat the

major share. At last the old man said to make two pieces of one pakora and to take two and a half pakoras each. The old lady was not in favour of making pieces of a pakora. Both of them lay down saying that whosoever would get us first would get the major share.



Now, none of them wanted to take the major share as they loved each other dearly. So they did not get up at all next morning. All the five families saw that the old lady and her husband were not awake. They took them to be dead. They broke open the door and entered the house. When they all started talking about taking them to the cremation ground the old man thought it was too much to keep quiet. He blurted out, "All right you eat only two. I will eat three." When the other people heard this they took them to be ghosts and they thought that they were talking about eating the families of that village.

They all ran back pell-mell to their houses. The old lady and her husband took the pakoras as decided. The other villagers had a hearty laugh as to why the old couple had been lying speechless for hours.

14

RAJA MAN SAH

RAJA Bahadur Sah was one of the rulers of Garhwal with his capital at Srinagar. After his death he was succeeded by his son Man Sah. On the occasion of his coronation Raja Man Sah summoned all the chiefs and Sardars of his kingdom to the darbar and ordered them to bring their *Sanads* and copper plates (*Tamra Patra*). All the Sardars and chiefs attended except Surju Dangwal, who had fled from Garhwal and had taken refuge at the court of Raja Lakshmi Chand of Champawat in Kumaon, soon after the death of Raja Bahadur Sah. Raja Man Sah sent a letter to Surju Dangwal ordering him to return to Garhwal. But the letter had no effect. Surju refused to return. He informed Raja Man Sah that he was much better off at Champawat. Raja Man Sah wrote a second letter to Surju. But he got the same reply. He then wrote to Raja Lakshmi Chand to send back Surju to Srinagar. Lakshmi Chand did not want to hand over a man who had taken his shelter. He refused to do so. He even threatened to invade Garhwal and raze its capital to the ground, if Raja Man Sah demanded again Surju's return.

This reply of Lakshmi Chand enraged Raja Man Sah. He collected a large army and invaded Champawat. A fierce battle over several days was fought between the two armies. The battle-field was covered with the bodies of the dead soldiers. The wild animals of the forest came in hordes and fed on the corpses. After a fierce battle of seven days Raja Lakshmi Chand fled away from the battle-field. On hearing this his Rani reproached him for his cowardice and took over the command of the army. She fought most heroically for several

days ; but was overpowered by the enemy's forces and she surrendered. She handed over Surju to Raja Man Sah. Raja Man Sah did not proceed any further against the Rani or her husband. He brought back Surju to Garhwal and his coronation was duly celebrated.

15

IN SEARCH OF FATE

THIS is a story of two brothers who did not get on well at first but had made up later and lived happily thereafter. It is a very common belief with the people of Himachal Pradesh that men are ruled by their pre-ordained destiny and what is fated cannot be avoided. This story illustrates the firm belief in fate but also suggests that sleeping fate forgetful of the man could be aroused. The sturdy people of Himachal have often to fight against Nature in their hilly country and the story shows they would not always submit to their troubles.

Long long ago, there were two brothers named Bhinwa and Hinwa. Bhinwa was very cunning and he always kept his younger brother, Hinwa, busy. Bhinwa made Hinwa graze the cattle, till the land and buy things for the household. Hinwa used to get only four dry *chapatis* after a day's hard labour. One day Hinwa forgot to take his plough while going to the field. He came back home to get it. When Hinwa had gone to the house his wife had gone out to a friend's house. Hinwa entered the kitchen and saw different kinds of tasty items of food which would make the mouth water. When Hinwa reached home after a day's hard labour he got only four *chapatis*. He became enraged. He asked his brother, Bhinwa, why he gave only four *chapatis* when there were other items of tasty food which he had himself seen in the house. Bhinwa then sarcastically said, "Brother, I am afraid your Fate is now fast asleep beyond the seven seas and that is the reason you are destined to get dry bread every day." Hinwa took the words of his brother very seriously and made up his mind to meet his Fate, wake him up and enquire the reason of his misfortune.

Hinwa started on his journey. While he was on the move he came near a very big tree. He saw a snake climbing the tree. High up in one of the branches he saw an eagle's nest. The parent eagles at that time had gone out in search for food for their young ones. Hinwa killed the big snake and laid it down under that tree. When the eagles came back, they saw Hinwa under that tree and also the dead snake. They understood everything and thanked Hinwa. They further asked if they could be of any further use to him. Hinwa told them that he was going in search of his Fate and that his Fate was sleeping beyond the seven seas. The father eagle promised to take Hinwa across the seven seas on its wings. Before they started on their journey Hinwa saw a tree whose leaves were all dry. The tree wanted Fate to be asked as to why no fresh green leaves were coming on the tree. Hinwa promised to find this out. The eagle took Hinwa across the seven seas and brought him to the place where his Fate was lying fast asleep. Hinwa aroused his Fate and asked him to help him. Fate agreed. Another question Hinwa had put to Fate was as to why the tree was withering. His Fate told him that it was because a serpent had hidden himself under its roots guarding a big treasure buried there. His Fate further told him that the only way to help the tree from withering away is to kill the serpent and take the treasure. Hinwa then thanked his Fate and rode again on the eagle as before.

The eagle brought him back. Hinwa then killed the serpent and took the treasure. The tree immediately started getting new leaves. Hinwa then caught hold of a wild horse roaming in the forest and tamed it. He rode on it. When he was passing over the dominion of a king he heard that the daughter of that king was suffering from a particular disease which could not be cured by any doctor. Hinwa, who knew certain medicinal herbs, gave them to her. The king's daughter became well again. The king was so happy that he made him his son-in-law. Hinwa came back home with his wife and all the riches. Bhinwa greeted him. The two brothers lived in happiness thereafter.

16

GOL, THE GOD-KING

CENTURIES ago at Kumaon there was a king who had seven wives. He had, however, no children. He was very sad about this. His ministers advised him to take another wife. He did so. Sometime after it was known that the eighth queen will have a baby. Great were the rejoicings in the kingdom. The king was very happy. He distributed gifts and offered *pujas* at the various temples. But the seven wives of the king were very sore. They felt very jealous also as the king went on showering his favours on the eighth wife. They thought they must do something.

They gave out that since there are seven of them they will look after the eighth wife when the baby would come. They pretended great affection for the eighth queen and told the king not to worry.

They had bandaged the eye of the eighth queen. The queen gave birth to a lovely son. The other queens removed the child quickly and kept a big stone in its place. They told her that she had given birth to a piece of stone.

The king rushed to see the baby. The seven queens put up a long face and showed the stone. The king was bewildered and sorry. The seven queens muttered that only a witch could have a stone as the baby. This went home. The king was furious and said she would not be the queen any longer but remain as the maid-servant. This was quickly done.

Now the seven wives thought of doing away with the child. They kept the child in front of a serpent but the serpent raised its hood over the baby and protected

him from the sun. They quietly put the child in front of an elephant. The elephant gently touched the baby with its trunk and moved away.

Finally the seven wicked queens put the child in an iron box and put it in the river. The box sank and the seven queens heaved a sigh of relief.

A fisherman nearby had put out his net to catch fish. He netted the iron box which was opened and the baby was found alive. The fisherman had no children and so he started rearing the baby. The baby grew into a lovely, strong boy full of fun. He loved his bow and arrow shooting and became an expert in the arrows. So he was called Gulel. Gradually his name became Gol.

Now it was very peculiar that he remembered the past. Once the boy had gone to the river-side with his bow and arrow. The seven queens had come to the river for a bath and to carry away pitchers of water. The maid-servant had also accompanied them. While they were returning with their pitchers full of water, the boy clean shot arrows into the pitchers and the pitchers were broken. When the maid-servant's turn came he shot a flower which fell on her hair and stuck there.

The next day again the boy reached the same spot along with a wooden horse. When the queens came to fill their pitchers with water he stopped them and told them that his horse would have his drink first. The ladies scolded him and told him that a wooden horse could not drink any water. But he was obstinate. He broke their pitchers. When, however, the last queen, now maid-servant, came he filled her pitcher with water and gave it to her.

The seven queens went back and weepingly complained to the king about it.

The king got wild and sent for the boy. When the boy came the king asked him, "Why did you break

their pitchers?" The boy said, "Your Majesty ! They did not allow my wooden horse a drink first as my wooden horse was very thirsty. After all they were taking away pitchers full of water to be used later."

The king tauntingly asked, "Can a wooden horse drink water from the river?"

The boy said, "If a queen could give birth to a piece of stone, I suppose a wooden horse could also drink water."

The youngest queen, then a maid servant, heard this. She rushed out and embraced the boy. The king understood what had happened. He was wild with anger and gave death sentence to the seven of his wicked wives. But Gol was a very nice and generous boy. He begged of the king to pardon them. The king agreed. The king took Gol and his mother to the palace while he sent away the seven queens to the far-off portion of the palace.

Gol was handed over the kingdom after some years. He was a very kind king and his name spread all over. Even today Gol is recalled as a model of a king by the Kumaon people. Many think he was an *Avatar* (incarnation) of a god.

17

AN INTELLIGENT KING

LONG ago at the Chamba valley there was a man named Lachman Singh. Lachman Singh lost one of his arms in an accident. He had some 500 gold mohars to his credit. He was anxious that the money should be secure. Lachman Singh took the mohars and hid them in a pit under a tree in the forest. Every day he used to go and make sure that the money was there. He would visit the place, dig up the pit and see the mohars. One day he found that the money was missing.

Lachman Singh was very much upset. He went straight to the king's palace and complained about the theft. Lachman Singh appealed to the king to find out the culprit. On being questioned he told the king that he had no witness to produce either to the mohars being concealed there or about the theft.

The king was very intelligent. He found out that the leaves and the roots of the particular tree had medicinal value. He then made an enquiry as to who were the persons that suffered from the particular disease that would be cured by medicines made out of the leaves and roots of the tree. In this way the king could find out as to which of the men suffering from that particular disease had become suddenly rich. The culprit was traced. He confessed and refunded all the mohars. Lachman Singh was happy.

18

KAFFU CHAWHAN

ONCE upon a time Ajai Pal ruled over Garhwal. At the time of his coronation all the chiefs and nobles of his kingdom attended his *darbar* to pay homage to him. But there was one exception. Kaffu Chawhan who lived in the fort called Upgarh did not come to the coronation. Raja Ajai Pal summoned him but he refused to come and pay homage to Ajai Pal. He gave out that he was like a lion among the beasts and as a vulture among the birds and he would not pay any homage to anyone else. The Raja warned him that if he persisted in his disloyalty, his territory would be invaded. Kaffu was adamant and replied that instead of paying homage to Ajai Pal, he would invade Srinagar, the capital of Ajai Pal, and destroy his palace and gardens.

This affront enraged Ajai Pal and he invaded Kaffu's territory with a large army. He reached the banks of the Ganga river opposite the strong and high fort of Upgarh. Kaffu's mother saw from the window of the fort a mass of men on the opposite bank of the river. She enquired of Kaffu as to what it meant. Kaffu said that it was the army of Raja Ajai Pal whom he had offended by refusing to pay homage. On hearing this Kaffu's mother felt very sorry and said, "Oh my dear son ! You cannot possibly fight against such a huge army single handed. Please go and apologize to the Raja. I am sure he will pardon you." Kaffu said, "Mother ! I cannot possibly go and beg. I belong to a pure Kshatriya family. My father's soul would curse me from heaven for my cowardice." Kaffu descended from his fort and cut the ropes of the suspension bridge

connecting his fort with the other bank of the river. When Ajai Pal's army went to attack Kaffu's fort the next day they found the suspension bridge broken. They went and informed Ajai Pal about it. Ajai Pal ordered his army to put up another suspension bridge and surround the fort. On seeing this Kaffu's mother was very much frightened and she again pleaded her son to go and apologize to Ajai Pal. Kaffu said that he would not yield even if his head was separated from his body. Kaffu put on his armour and riding on his war horse rushed out of the fort and attacked the enemy with great valour and heroism. He faced the vast army single handed. Heaps of men died in his hands and blood flowed profusely. The battle-field was covered with blood and corpses. Kaffu after killing the army of Ajai Pal went by the side of the river to rest. When Kaffu's mother saw so much blood-shed and corpses, she thought that Kaffu too had shared the same fate. Kaffu's mother never wanted to fall a prey to the enemy. She set fire to the fort and perished with the rest of the family. When Kaffu returned to the fort victorious to convey the happy news to his mother he saw the fort on fire. He was much upset and stood still. Some of Ajai Pal's men were passing that way. They saw Kaffu in that condition and went and informed Ajai Pal about it. Ajai Pal was so overjoyed that he himself went to the place. Ajai Pal said to his men, "As Kaffu would not bow to me so long as he was alive so cut off his head in such a way that it may fall at my feet." When the soldiers were about to carry Ajai Pal's orders, Kaffu shook his head with rage, swallowed two handfuls of dust and stared at Ajai Pal with a contemptuous smile. When Kaffu's head was cut, it fell towards Ajai Pal's head rather than towards his feet. Ajai was struck with the heroism of Kaffu so much so that he performed the funeral rites with military honour on the banks of the sacred Ganges. Kaffu's heroism is often related to the children in Himachal Pradesh by their grandmothers.

19

KALA BHANDARI

GURU Gyan Chand was a historical figure who has become a legend in Himachal Pradesh now. He was a king of Champawatgarh and ruled for a long time. Many folk tales are woven round him. This is one of them.

In times of yore there lived one Kala Bhandari at a place called Lakhimpur. His father's name was Biru Bhandari. Kala Bhandari was a great hero. Even as a child he had done feats involving great strength.

When he was only twelve years old, he saw in his dream, a beautiful girl named Udaimala, whose father was Dhamdeo of Kalinkot. He was so much taken up by his dream girl that he decided to marry her.

Kala Bhandari left his place in search of his dream girl. After a long and arduous journey he reached Kalinkot. He managed to enter the apartment of Udaimala. Udaimala also fell in love with him. They used to meet secretly and their love deepened.

Kala Bhandari decided to come out from his secret meetings, which he did and requested Dhamdeo to give him Udaimala in marriage. Dhamdeo agreed on the condition that Kala Bhandari paid him one *supa* of rupees. A supa is a winnowing basket. Kala Bhandari agreed to his condition and said he would shortly return with the money.

Kala Bhandari came back home. In the meantime there was great trouble at Champawat, the capital of Guru Gyan Chand. Four reputed warriors of great strength went to Champawat, the capital of Guru Gyan

Chand and challenged him to send a warrior to fight with them. They threatened to destroy his capital if he failed to comply. Gyan Chand was in a fix. He called all his ministers and courtiers and took their counsel. All of them were of the opinion that the only man who could fight those hefty warriors was Kala Bhandari, although a lad of twelve years. Guru Gyan Chand sent a letter to Kala Bhandari through a messenger. But Kala Bhandari's father was not willing to send him.

Kala Bhandari, however, was keen. He went on requesting his father to send him. At last Kala Bhandari's father yielded and allowed him to go. Kala Bhandari then reached Raja Gyan Chand's palace at Champawat. Gyan Chand on seeing such a young lad was very much disappointed. He could not believe that such a young lad could face those hefty warriors. But he had no other option.

Kala Bhandari ordered that the palace drums should be beaten in his honour from that day instead of for the four warriors. When the warriors came to know about it they felt offended and called for an explanation from the king. The king then told them that he was sending a warrior to fight with them, and that this warrior had ordered the drums to be beaten in his name.

Kala Bhandari went to the battle-field and challenged the warriors to fight with him. At first all the four warriors rushed together; but Kala Bhandari protested saying that it was not fair that four warriors should fight with one man. They consented and they selected two out of them and fought with him. There was a long and fierce fight. But at the end Kala Bhandari dashed them on the ground and killed them.

When the other two warriors saw their companions falling to the ground they committed suicide.

Guru Gyan Chand was very much pleased at the victory of Kala Bhandari and he gave him rewards. Kala Bhandari returned home laden with gifts.



While all this was going on Rupa Gangsara of Gangsarihat had come to Dhamdeo and wanted to marry his daughter Udaimala. Rupa Gangsara distributed large sums of money among Dhamdeo's courtiers to win their favour and also gave rich presents to Dhamdeo. Dhamdeo agreed to give Udaimala in marriage to Rupa. The marriage was fixed and Rupa came along with a large procession to marry Udaimala.

Ten days before the marriage of Udaimala Kala Bhandari had a dream. He saw in his dream Udaimala. Udaimala told him that she was being forced to marry Rupa Gangsara. Udaimala also implored Kala Bhandari to come and take her away on the day of the marriage. Kala Bhandari was very much perplexed. He told his father all this. Kala Bhandari's father dissuaded him from going and advised him to give up the idea of marrying Udaimala. But Kala Bhandari was adamant. He had made up his mind to marry Udaimala. He smeared his body with ashes and disguised himself as a *sadhu*. He started for Kalinkot and reached there just a

day before the marriage of Udaimala with Rupa. He managed to enter the room where Udaimala was sitting. It was arranged between them that she should not perform the ninth *phera** with Rupa, on the pretext that she would do so only after seeing the Guru.

The wedding ceremony started at the appointed time with all pomp and show and to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The bride and the bridegroom started going round the sacrificial fire. They went round it eight times. Udaimala refused to do the ninth *phera* and said that she could not do it without seeing her Guru, who was a sadhu. But to complete the marriage the ninth *phera* was essential.

The procession then started towards the banks of the Ganges and waited there for the guru. Bards entertained the marriage party with music and dancing. When all of them were thus enjoying, Kala Bhandari in the guise of a *sadhu* appeared there. Udaimala recognised him and said that her Guru was well versed in dancing with sword and shield in hand. All the people were keen to see his dance and requested the *sadhu* to entertain the party. They gave him a sword and shield for the purpose. The *sadhu* made the parties of the bride and bridegroom sit in separate blocks. The *sadhu* took the sword and shield and started dancing. While dancing very cleverly he cut off the heads of all the men belonging to the bridegroom's party. The only man who could escape death was Rupa's younger brother, Lula Gangola. Lula begged Kala Bhandari to spare him. Kala Bhandari took pity on him and did not kill him.

After killing all the enemies Kala Bhandari went to meet Udaimala. While he was talking to Udaimala

*The bride and the bridegroom have to go round the sacrificial fire nine times in an auspicious time. Going round the fire is called *phera*.

he felt very thirsty. Udaimala then ordered Lula to bring water. Lula brought water and also a big stone. While Kala Bhandari was taking water Lula threw the stone on his head with all his force. Kala Bhandari died then and there but he managed to cut off the head of Lula just before his death.

Udaimala wept bitterly and fell unconscious. On regaining consciousness she gathered courage. She kept Rupa's head on one lap and Kala Bhandari's head on the second lap and mounted the funeral pyre and became a *sati*. *Sati* means that the widow will burn herself in the funeral pyre lit for her husband.

20

BUDDHINATH

IN Himachal in the olden days a man could have more than one wife. As a matter of fact it was often taken as a mark of affluence if a man had more than one wife. This is a story how an intelligent man could win seven girls because of his intelligence.

In Kurmanchal there were three brothers. The eldest could produce six bags of rice in a very small plot of land. The second was capable of milking any cow and bring out one maund of milk. The third brother who was very intelligent used to compose songs and sing. Their names were Siddhinath, Riddhinath and Buddhnath. Siddhi means a person will always be successful. Riddhi means a person will always be self-sufficient. Buddhi implies intelligence.

All the three brothers were just as they were named. As the youngest brother preferred isolation so his brothers took him to be a fool and called him Buddhnath which means a fool.

The three brothers had to buy some pulses, oil etc. For this purpose they had to go upto Almora. There were actually two roads leading to Almora. One was a shorter route and the other was longer.

Siddhinath started to buy the grocery necessary for them. He chose the shorter route. After covering a long distance he came across a betel shop. The shopkeeper spoke to him very affectionately and offered him tea. Siddhinath took tea. The shopkeeper then said that he would narrate an incident for which he has to say all right. Otherwise he would cut his nose and ears. Siddhinath accepted the condition thinking that it would not

be difficult for him to nod. The shopkeeper then said, "I have an ox which has five horns." Siddhinath then said, "It is possible. In our own village a lady gave birth to quintuplets. Your ox has five horns. It is all nature's wish."

The shopkeeper then said, "One horn will go to the Himalayas and bring snow and ice. The second will go down the deep sea and bring ruby and pearls. The third will go to Kabul and bring all kinds of dry fruits. The fourth will go to Bengal and bring tasty mouth-watering *Rasagollas* (a kind of famous sweet of Bengal). The fifth will go to Delhi and bring antiques."

The shopkeeper had not even finished his narration when suddenly Siddhinath said, "It is true that you may be having an ox having five horns but their horns could never do such unusual acts."

The shopkeeper then called his son and asked him to cut his nose and ears. Siddhinath begged to be excused. He surrendered his money and his possessions but the shopkeeper did not leave him. He cut his nose and ears and left him.

Siddhinath hid his nose and ears with the help of a towel and came back home. Siddhinath told his brothers that dacoits had cut his nose and ears but spared him of his money.

Riddhinath who heard his brother's story thought of taking revenge. He started on his journey. He also took the shorter route. He also met the same shopkeeper. Riddhinath also lost his ears and nose and returned home.

Buddhinath who was the youngest brother got ready to go to Almora. Both his elder brothers allowed him to go. Buddhinath took the shorter route and came near the same betel shop. The shopkeeper started narrating the story. All the time when the shopkeeper was narrating the story Buddhinath was looking inside the kitchen. He saw seven ladies busy grinding yellow turmeric.

Buddhinath kept on nodding his head. When the shopkeeper finished his story Buddhinath said, "Uncle, I also have a story to say. If you say 'no' any time I will cut your nose and ears. Do you agree to the condition ?"

The shopkeeper agreed to the condition. Buddhinath said, "We were seven brothers. All of us were married and each one of us had a handsome wife. We were all very proud of them. One day a gust of wind came and all the wives flew away."

The shopkeeper said, "All this is possible. Your pride in them snatched all of them from you."

Buddhinath then said, "But uncl^r I am seeing all of them here. Please tell me whether it is correct or not ?"

The shopkeeper was in a fix. Had he said 'yes' he would have to lose his daughters-in-law. If he were to say 'no' then he would have to lose his nose and ears. The shopkeeper gathered courage and said, "Well you must be able to recognise all of them." Buddhinath said, "Well their hands were yellow."

The shopkeeper said, "The hands of my daughters-in-law are fair." He called all of them and asked them to show their hands. All their hands were yellow.

The shopkeeper was very much puzzled. He called all his sons and told them everything. They told his father to give away his daughters-in-law and that they would marry a second time. The sons were not in favour of their father losing his nose and ears. Buddhinath brought all the handsome ladies to his house and lived happily along with all of them.

The shopkeeper spent the remaining part of his life in *Hari Kirtan* (singing in praise of God).

21

THE STORY OF GORIL

JHALU Rai was the ruler of Champawatgarh. Jhalu Rai came of a line of illustrious kings.

Jhalu Rai had seven queens, but no children. He was very fond of hunting. One day he went to a forest for hunting with a large retinue. After covering a long distance he felt very thirsty and ordered his men to fetch water for him. The king's men after a long search came near a small tank of water with two fountains, one fountain of gold and the other was of silver. There was a small deserted temple near the tank. They opened the doors of the temple and found a goddess inside. The goddess did not allow them to take water from her tank. The king's men went back and informed the Raja about it. The Raja was enraged and attacked the temple. The temple was of the goddess Kalindra. But when the king saw Kalindra in the shape of a girl he fell in love with her. He brought her home in a palanquin and married her. The king loved the new queen very dearly but the other queens became jealous. After some time it came to be known that Kalindra will have a baby. The seven queens of the Raja were envious and wanted to take revenge. They said they would look after Kalindra and did not let any nurse come to her. When Kalindra was going to have the baby the seven queens gave out that the mother must not see the child just after birth. They bandaged Kalindra's eyes. Kalindra gave birth to a super human child. The child was named as Goril. The step mothers of Goril, on seeing him, put him in a casket of gold and threw him into the river. But as Goril was superhuman, he managed to inform his father from within the casket that he was his son. The Raja on hearing

this, ordered the casket to be opened and on opening it he found a child of extraordinary beauty inside it. On learning of the treachery of his seven queens, Jhalu Rai ordered them to be beheaded and celebrated the birth of his son in a right royal manner. After the death of Jhalu Rai, Goril ascended the throne.

Goril became famous for his noble qualities. He loved his people and did a lot of good for them.

A large number of temples are still found in Himachal Pradesh dedicated to Goril. People of Himachal Pradesh still mention Goril as an ideal monarch who lived for his subjects.

THE CLEVER PRINCESS

ONCE upon a time there was a king who had only one daughter. His minister also had one daughter. The two girls were of the same age and were playmates. They used to go and learn lessons from the same *Guru* (teacher). The teacher used to get one gold coin from the king's daughter and a silver coin from the minister's daughter every month. He used to bless the king's daughter that she would marry a corpse and the minister's daughter that she would marry a prince.

When both the girls grew up they came to realise the meaning of this blessing. The king's daughter started worrying about her future. She used to remain very sad and thoughtful. The king wanted to know why his daughter was so sad. He was told the reason. He felt very sorry for his daughter. He knew that whatever in the past the *Guru* had predicted had actually happened.

He gave up his kingdom and went with his daughter to a forest. He wanted to live in the forest for some time doing charity to the mendicants and beggars.

While walking in the forest they were very tired and thirsty. They saw a small house deep inside the forest. They started walking faster towards the house thinking they would get rest and water there. No sooner the king's daughter entered the house than the doors automatically closed. The king could not go in however much he tried. He waited there for three days but had to go back disappointed.

On finding she could not go out to her father the king's daughter wept for the whole day. At the end of

the day when she could not come out of the house she started going through all the rooms. She found to her utter surprise that the house was well furnished and had all household stuff. She went into all the rooms one by one. At the end when she opened the last room she was wonder-struck. She found one corpse laid there. She suddenly realised that whatever had been predicted for her would come out true and she took the corpse to be her husband. The man had died long time back and there were small *dub* grasses on the body. That night the girl dreamt that if she would worship the Sun God and pluck one *dub* grass a day the corpse would be revived. The girl started doing this every day.

But the king's daughter was very lonely. One day a poor oil merchant passed and came to the house for some water. The king's daughter gave them food and water. She begged the man to leave his daughter with her. As he was very poor he left the daughter and went away.

Now the king's daughter was very happy as she had a companion. The oil merchant's daughter saw the king's daughter worshipping the Sun God early in the morning and plucking one *dub* grass from the dead body. She asked the king's daughter as to why she did so. The king's daughter told her that when all the *dub* grass would be removed the corpse would be revived and she would marry him. The oil merchants' daughter was very clever. She noticed that only one *dub* was left.

The next morning the oil merchant's daughter got up earlier. She worshipped the Sun God and pulled out the last *dub* grass. The man woke up as if from a deep slumber. On seeing her he fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. She quickly agreed. They exchanged garlands.

The king's daughter after finishing her cooking went to that room as usual. But to her utter surprise she found both of them sitting and chatting. The oil merchant's daughter gave out she was the maid servant

in the house. The table was turned against her. The king's daughter became the maid-servant.

One day the man went to the town. While going he asked his wife what she would like him to bring from the town. She asked for some bright red bangles, nice dress and some sweets. He asked the maid-servant what she wanted. She asked him to bring one "Mina" bird from the town.

Aster a few days the man returned and brought all that he was asked to buy. He gave the "Mina" bird to the maid servant and the bangles etc. to his wife.

The maid servant started teaching the "Mina" bird to talk. Whenever she found time she used to narrate her own sad story to the "Mina" bird and feel some comfort. The merchant's daughter could not tolerate even this. She wanted to snatch the bird from her. She went and complained to her husband. She told him that the maid-servant neglected her duty. But the man refused to believe her. He sent for the bird and wanted to hear her. The cage was brought and kept in their room. The bird started narrating the whole story of the king's daughter. When she reached the point where the oil merchant's daughter plucked the last *dub* grass she got up and wanted to catch the bird. The bird flew away and perched itsclf on the ventilator and finished narrating the whole story. The man was beside himself with anger. He asked the oil merchant's daughter if the story of the "Mina" bird was true. She admitted. The husband wanted to kill her. The king's daughter was very sweet-natured. She prevented him.

The man took the king's daughter as his wife and made the oil merchant's daughter a maid-servant.

The man and his wife went to the latter's father. The old king was very happy and thereafter they all lived together.

23

THE IMPATIENT MONEY-LENDER

THREE was a money-lender at village Bhramar who had more money than brain and his one aim of life was to give loans and realise the money with a good amount of interest.

One day this money-lender visited the house of Mangat Singh, a debtor of his. Mangat Singh had taken a loan of rupees two hundred only and there was an interest of rupees one hundred. Mangat Singh had failed to keep his promise to pay back the principal and the interest.

Mangat Singh was not in the house when the money-lender called. But the money-lender would not come back and asked Mangat's wife for the money. She was a clever woman. She quickly went into the store-room and came out with four round white pumpkins. She showed the pumpkins to the money-lender and said, "Sir, these are the four eggs our mare has laid. After they are hatched we will sell the colts and get a lot of money. Please do wait for some time and your loan will be repaid." The money-lender quickly calculated that four colts will fetch him more than rupees three hundred. He retorted, "Well, I have waited for a long time. You could give me the mare's eggs in repayment of the loan and I will be satisfied." Mangat's wife pretended that she was not happy. "How can you be given the four eggs when the four colts will surely fetch rupees five hundred?" Ultimately she agreed and the money-lender was given the four round pumpkins. Mangat's wife cautioned and said to the money-lender, "Sir, please be very careful when you climb the hills as the eggs will hatch soon."

While climbing the mountain which the money-lender had to do to go to his village, he slipped and the load of the four pumpkins rolled down the slope of the mountain. From the top he saw a few deer running away. The money-lender was convinced that they were colts that had come out of the mare's eggs.

He was fooled by the clever wife of the debtor.

24

ASHTA BALI

FAR away in the slopes of the mountainous region of Himachal there was a small family consisting of the father, mother and a daughter named Renuka. Renuka got married when she was hardly nine years old. The bridegroom came from a far-off village.

Renuka was home-sick and wanted to visit her parents. The custom of the place was that the brother must come and take his sister home. Renuka had no brother. So no body could come to take her to her parents' house. Renuka felt miserable and constantly thought of her parents.

She planted a *Semal* sapling on the slope of a hillock. (*Semal* is silk-cotton tree and is quite common in the hilly portions.) She used to treat the sapling as her parents' plant. Everyday she will visit the place and sit near the sapling. As time went by the sapling grew into a big tree.

One day Renuka had a dream. A goddess appeared in her dream and said, "Renuka, I wish that after a few days you will have a brother."

Renuka then said, "If I get a brother I will do *Ashta Bali*." When a long cherished desire is fulfilled people usually perform *Ashta Bali*. This means that eight animals will be sacrificed and offered to a particular deity.

Some time after, Renuka's mother gave birth to a son who was named Ranvir.

Ranvir started growing. He had a good number of friends. On festive occasions their married sisters used

to come and give them sweets and make merry. Ranvir also wanted a sister. One day while talking to his mother he came to know that he also had a sister named Renuka, who was given in marriage at a far off place. Ranvir was a courageous boy. He wanted to meet his sister. He did not know the way. One day he had a dream. In his dream he saw a lady sitting near a tree and wiping her tears. He went near her and heard her calling "Bhaiya, Bhaiya" ("brother, oh my brother").



Ranvir got up in the morning and told his mother about the dream he had. He told his mother that he would go and bring his sister back. Ranvir's mother did not want to send his son as he was young. But Ranvir was adamant. Ranvir got the name of the village where his sister was married and started his journey. He reached the village and met his sister and found she was the girl of the dream. The brother and the sister were very happy.

Renuka had not forgotten her promise to the goddess. She prepared herself for the *Ashta Bali*. She collected the materials for the sacrificial fire. She got a

number of *Pundits* to do *Ashta Bali*. The *Pundits* started chanting the *mantras* and the *Yajna* (the religious ceremony) started. When the sacrifice (*bali*) had to be done the priests called for the goats to be sacrificed. Suddenly a divine voice was heard that goats will not do but human sacrifice has to be done. This was stunning to Renuka. But she stood up and offered herself for the sacrifice. But the divine voice was heard again. "No, a woman cannot be the proper sacrifice. It must be a male. Offer your sons." Renuka was dazed and became speechless. The divine voice thundered. "If you are unwilling, forget about your promise." Renuka got up and sacrificed two of her sons, cutting their heads herself with a sharp sword.

Both the heads rolled on the floor. The onlookers were stunned. Renuka wrapped those heads and kept them inside and placed the body on the altar. She had a keen desire to have another look at the faces of her sons.

Renuka once again heard the divine voice. "Bring the heads as well. Sacrifice is done only with the head."

Renuka quickly entered the other room where she had kept the heads. To her utter surprise she found the two sons playing there.

Renuka was overjoyed and embraced the sons. The divine voice again spoke :—"Now you can sacrifice the goats. I wanted to test your devotion." The goats were sacrificed and *Ashta Bali* was performed.

Renuka took the two sons with her and went to her parents with the brother. Great was the rejoicing at the union of Renuka with her parents after many many years.

25

YOUR MAJESTY IS THE FOURTH FOOL

ONCE upon a time a certain king ordered his minister to go and bring four fools from his kingdom. The minister started on his journey to search for the fools. The minister saw a man riding a pony, with a heavy load on his head. The minister was convinced he was a fool as he could have put the load on the horse. He selected him as the first fool and asked the man to accompany him.

The minister proceeded ahead. He saw a man casting sweets to the people on the streets. The minister called him and asked him the reason of his distributing sweets. The man said, "Sir, After I divorced my wife, she had married again. Now she has given birth to a son. I am very happy at this and out of joy for her son I am distributing sweets." The minister had met his second fool and asked the man to accompany him.

The minister came back to the court and presented the two fools to the king. The king asked the minister to give him the reasons for selecting them as fools. The minister gave the ruler the reasons and the king was highly pleased. Then the king said, "I had asked you to bring four fools. Why have you brought only two? Where are the two others?" The minister then humbly said, "Your Majesty, I am the third fool because I have no other work and I am wasting my time in search of fools and idiots." The king then said, "Now, let me know where is the fourth fool?" The minister then begged to be excused from answering this question. But the king insisted on a reply. The minister replied, "Your Majesty, excuse me. You are the fourth fool." The king enquir-

ed of the minister as to why he was calling him a fool. The minister then said, "Your Majesty, You are the fourth fool because you are bent on finding out four fools rather than four wise men."

The king saw the wisdom of the minister. He felt ashamed of himself and he rewarded the minister for his intelligence and the humility with which he presented the matter.

26

FAITH IN THE CHARITY OF GOD

WHEN it becomes very cold in the hilly regions of the Himachal Pradesh people have long wintry nights to spend and they often entertain themselves by reciting stories. The active people become idlers through the rigours of the climate and love to laze themselves sitting by the side of fire lit in a charcoal stove (*angethi*) and hearing stories that encourage idleness. Here is a story often recited.

In times of yore there were two brothers named Hari Ram and Moti Ram. Both of them were married. Hari Ram, the elder of the two, was very diligent and always worked very hard. Moti Ram was very very lazy. He never used to go out. Moti Ram's wife used to get angry with him for his laziness. Whenever Moti Ram was pressed by his wife to go out and work he used to say, if God was pleased with him he would send the riches inside the house himself, by breaking open the roof. Moti Ram's wife failed to persuade him. One day she had gone to the jungle for grazing her cattle. While she was grazing her cattle she found a jar full of gold mohars buried there. She covered the pit with mud and grass so that nobody might discover it. She returned home and gave out all that she had seen. She requested her husband to accompany her to that place at night and help her to bring the jar home. But as Moti Ram was very lazy he still went on saying that if God was pleased he would send the riches himself. Moti Ram further said that he would not act like a thief to acquire the riches.

As Moti Ram's wife could not prevail on him any further, she at last decided to share the secret with her

sister-in-law. She went and told everything to her sister-in-law. But her sister-in-law was very greedy. She thought of taking possession of all the gold by asking her husband to accompany her. She refused to accompany Moti Ram's wife saying that she would not risk her life by going there at night. Moti Ram's wife went home and slept cursing her own fate. Hari Ram's wife woke up her husband and went to the forest along with him. She showed Hari Ram the place where the riches were buried. Hari Ram started digging the earth and grass. As the jar was buried many years ago so there were many hornets. They started stinging Hari Ram's hand. Both Hari Ram and his wife thought that this was a trick played upon them by his brother and his wife. They thought of taking revenge by dropping the jar (full of gold mohars) into their house through the chimney hole thinking that the hornets would sting them. They did accordingly.

As all the hornets had already flown away, the gold mohars started falling into their house. Moti Ram got up and found the whole house full of gold mohars. He called his wife and said, "Look ! God is pleased with us and that is why He has thrown the mohars inside our house Himself."

The faith of Moti Ram in God's bounty was thus confirmed.

27

MALU SAHI AND RAJULA

THREE reigned a king named Dham Sahi in Kat-yurgarh in a remote part of Himachal Pradesh. Dham Sahi was the son of Pithora Chand. Dham Sahi's wife was Dharmavati. They had no children. The husband and wife prayed hard for twelve long years for a son. At last God was pleased and they were blessed with a son who was given the name of Malu Sahi. Malu Sahi was a precocious child and was born a true hero. Just at the time of the birth of Malu Sahi, a daughter was born to Raja Saunpati Sonk of Saunkot. The daughter was named as Rajula. Rajula grew to be a very charming and gracious girl.

When Malu Sahi was only twelve years of age, his father Dham Sahi married him to two beautiful princesses named Hansia and Kansia. Rajula also grew up in the meantime. Princes from far and wide went to seek the hands of Rajula. Rajula's father ultimately decided to give his daughter in marriage to Guna Pal, Prince of Jalander. An auspicious day was fixed for their marriage. Great preparations were made for the marriage.

Just a few days before the marriage Rajula saw Malu Sahi in a dream. She was enchanted by his comely appearance. Likewise Malu Sahi also had a dream. He saw Rajula in the dream and she told him to take her away so that she was not married to Guna Pal.

When Malu Sahi woke up he became very uneasy in mind and told his mother about the dream. He gave out he wanted to bring Rajula and marry her. Malu Sahi's mother tried to dissuade him but Malu Sahi was

adamant. Malu Sahi started for Saunkot. While going to Saunkot he passed through the country of the seven witches. When the witches saw Malu Sahi they fell in love with him. The witches tried all their wits to entrap him. But Malu Sahi due to his intelligence overpowered them and proceeded further. Malu Sahi then reached Trijugi peak, the abode of Shiva. He prayed to Lord Shiva to help him in his enterprise.

He proceeded further and reached Saunkot. He disguised himself as a sadhu and sat in front of the palace of Raja Saunpati. When Raja Saunpati looked at the sadhu, he was very much impressed. He ordered his men to take him inside the palace and to look after his comforts. Malu Sahi then met Rajula and told her about the dream. Rajula also told him about her dream. The two immediately fell in love with each other. On the day of the marriage Guna Pal arrived with all his men. Rajula entreated Malu Sahi to take her away.

On the eve of the wedding Malu Sahi eloped with Rajula. As soon as Guna Pal came to know about it he pursued them with his retinue. They saw them crossing a rope bridge over a river.

Guna Pal and his followers also reached the bridge. When they were crossing the bridge Malu Sahi cut the ends of the rope. The bridge fell down and all the men were drowned in the river. Malu Sahi then brought Rajula to Katyurgarh and married her with all pomp and show.

There was great rejoicing at Katyurgarh and both Malu Sahi and Rajula along with the two other queens lived happily.

28

HOW A DEBT IS REPAYED

THE sturdy people of Himachal Pradesh are simple and truthful. This story of an incident in the *Mahabharata* is commonly recited to the children by the elders to impress on them that one should be straight and honest in thought.

The Himachal people to a man know the story of the *Mahabharata*. They know the story of the years of exile of the Pandava brothers in the jungles.

The Pandavas and the Kauravas were going to fight out their quarrel as to whether the Pandavas would be given their half share of the kingdom on return from thirteen years' exile in the forests. The Pandavas had no money to fight. Yudhisthir, the eldest brother, sent the youngest brother Sahdev to Kuver, the God of wealth, to borrow two millions of rupees.

Kuver was duly approached by Sahdev. Kuver asked Sahdev, if he would not be happy if he was given the money. Sahdev replied that, indeed, he would be very happy. Then Kuver asked if he would repay the debt with the same feeling of happiness. Sahdev replied he would. Kuver did not give him the money and Sahdev came back disappointed.

Yudhisthir then sent Nakul to Kuver. The same question was put and Nakul also gave the same reply. No money was given to Nakul.

Yudhisthir sent the two other brothers for money, one by one, and they both came back dejected and gave out that Kuver would not give the money. They related

to Yudhisthir that Kuver had put the self-same question and they had given back the identical reply.

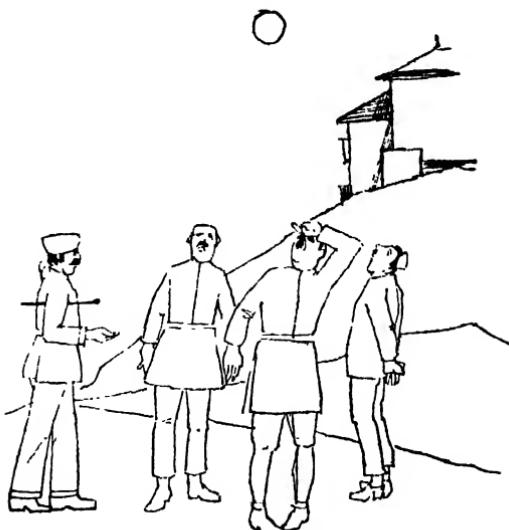
Then Yudhisthir approached Kuver for the money. Kuver asked him the same question. Yudhisthir gave the reply : "Oh, Kuver, how could it be so ? The borrower feels very happy when he gets the loan. When he repays he does it with regret and sorrow. Human nature is so fickle."

Kuver was pleased with the truthful reply and gave Yudhisthir all the money he needed.

29

AN HONEST OFFICER

A SENIOR officer in Himachal once upon a time wanted to test his subordinates. The officer came out of the room during a hot sunny day and spoke to his subordinates, "Look at the number of stars shining in the sky." All his subordinates excepting one said, "Yes Sir, we can also see them, how bright they are." But one man stood at a distance and kept silent. The officer called him and said, "Why are you silent, can you not see the stars in the sky?" The man said rather indignantly, "Sir, I can hardly see anything in this powerful light of the sun. My eyes are watering. I feel that either my



eyes have gone bad or all of you have spoilt your eyes." The officer was very much pleased to hear such a frank reply. He rewarded the honest subordinate by giving him a promotion. He took to task the subordinates who had flattered him blindly and degraded them.

30

THE BLIND AND THE HUNCHBACK MAN

MANY many years back there was a blind beggar. There was also a hunchback man who used to beg everyday. But the share of alms that the blind got everyday was much more than what the hunchback man got. The hunchback thought of making friends with the blind man. He thought he could cheat and take out some of the blind man's alms. He went and talked to the blind man and told him that he would be of great help to him when he went for begging. The blind man after enquiring what he was doing and where he was putting up agreed to take him to his place.

The hunchback used to get up early in the morning, clean the whole house and cook. Then they both used to go together for begging. The blind get more than the hunchback. At night the blind used to count all his coins.

When the hunchback came to know about the box in which the blind kept his coins he wanted to steal his money. He thought of murdering the blind. The place where they used to go for begging was across a small hill which was very slippery. One day while they were thus passing from that side the hunchback quickly removed his hand and pushed the blind. He fell down but he caught hold of a branch of a tree. He called out the hunchback and in a pitiable tone requested him to help. When the hunchback saw him he felt pity for him and quickly went and helped him to come out. When the blind asked him why he pushed him like that he told him that a thorn had pricked his leg and he had no intention of pushing him. For some time they pulled on well.

One day the hunchback brought a dead snake and told the blind that he had brought a fish and that he should not go for begging and asked him to stir the fish while it is being cooked. He also told him that he might be coming late from town. He may keep a little fish curry for him and eat the rest. The hunchback thought that by eating the curry the blind will die and he can run away with his box.

The blindman started stirring the fish curry. His eyes started watering. But he did not leave stirring. Gradually he found that he could see things clearly. He found that the pot contained pieces of a snake. He quickly understood the plan of the hunchback man. He took a big rod and stood near the gate. The hunchback returned after a long delay and imagined that the blind man had died. As soon as he entered the house the blind man gave him a good beating. The hunchback fell down. The blind man then asked him, "Brother, did you not bring a snake and cut it to pieces to kill me ? Do you know that these pieces were so poisonous that their vapours had cured my eyesight ?"

On hearing this the hunchback said, "I brought these pieces only to cure your eyesight."

The blind man saw the trick but replied, "I had beaten you only to cure the hunch on your back."

When the hunchback stood up he found that there was no hunch on his back. He could walk straight.

Thereafter they separated but lived as life-long friends.

31

THE BONE OF DESIRE

IN the olden days there was a king of Swarnadesha in a tucked away corner of Himachal Pradesh named Udaygiri. Udaygiri was an ambitious king and grabbed the small kingdoms round him.

One evening he went out on a hunting expedition and was followed by a number of his men. He chased a deer and his galloping horse running after the deer brought him near a glistening river beyond which there



was a small town on the slopes of the hill. The deer crossed the river and disappeared in the forests beyond. The evening glow of the sun had lit up the area in a crimson haze and the king was struck by the beauty all round. The tinkling bells of the cattle returning home in the town beyond the river and some of the dias

(lamps) in some of the huts on the slope added to the charm.

The king enquired who was the headman of the village or town and wanted him to be sent for. The king's men informed him that the village fell outside his kingdom which stretched up to the river. He was told that the township was full of fishermen.

The avaricious king was sore to hear that the charming township on the slopes of the hill beyond the river did not belong to him and he at once ordered that his army be sent to the township for over-running it.

A bitter battle followed. The king's men had some battle-equipment while the fishermen fought with mere *lathis*. It was an unequal fight but the fishermen were determined to resist. A large number of fishermen lay dead and yet they would not yield and young children and even women started offering resistance. The stream water was changed into red by the blood of the fallen.

Udaygiri heard about the stiff resistance offered by the armless fishermen and his eyes blazed with anger. Two days after he himself camped on his side of the kingdom and wanted to guide the battle operations. He wanted to wipe out the entire population of the small town if it was necessary.

When he was discussing with his men as to what should be done an old man came and wanted to see the king. The king gave him audience and wanted to know why he had come to him when he was so busy. The old man with a flowing white beard and snowy hair on the head pulled out a small bone of the size of half of one's thumb and prayed that the bone be exchanged for a piece of gold that would be of the weight of the bone.

The king thought it was a joke and told the old man he could have double the weight of the bone in gold

as it was such a tiny thing and would not weigh more than a *masha* (a very small measure of weight). The old man was respectful but said, "Oh King, I do not want more gold than its weight. Kindly weigh it against gold and give me its weight in gold." Udaygiri took the old man to be mad and ordered that the bone be weighed against gold and the quantity of gold of the weight of the bone be given away.

But lo, what happened ? One masha, two mashas, ten mashas of gold were brought but the bone still weighed heavier. The king took the bone in his hand and examined it closely. It looked a tiny thing and was of light weight. But what miracle was happening when the bone was put in one side of the scale and gold in the other side ?

One kilo, two kilos, three kilos of gold proved no good. The king stopped the battle and ordered that his treasury be emptied and all gold be brought and weighed against the bone. The story spread and men, women and children from the township where blood was to be shed flocked fearlessly to see the miracle. The king's army was seized with some unknown fear and they all left their arms and they came to see the weighing.

No—the king's treasure could not be equal in weight to that small bone. The king was also afraid that he was on the brink of some disaster. He asked the old man, "Tell me, my man, what is the secret ? What bone is that ? Why can't I get the equal quantity of gold to weigh against the tiny bone ?"

The old man took back the bone and after looking deep into it handed it over to the king. "Oh king, I do not want the gold—you keep the bone. It is the bone of desire. You can never feed the desire satisfactorily. All the kingdom you have won has not satisfied you and you want to spill the blood of the innocent children and women of the township." The king's heart fluttered. He

said, "I understand, I shall not go on with this fight. Let all this gold be distributed to the families who have lost men in the fight." The king fell at the feet of the old man to touch his feet but found no feet to touch. The old man had vanished in the air—the tiny bone was in the hands of the king. The stream that had turned gory with blood had the glistening water again.

The king kept his promise. Since then Udaygiri was a patient, benevolent and kind king.

THE INAUSPICIOUS HOUR

ONCE upon a time a man named Suraj Bhan went to his father-in-law's house at an inauspicious hour. So the ghost also followed him. The ghost dressed himself exactly like Suraj Bhan. When Suraj Bhan went and stayed at his in-law's house the ghost also stayed as a shadow with him. Wherever Suraj Bhan went the ghost followed him. Suraj Bhan's father-in-law and mother-in-law also saw two similar sons-in-law. His wife was in a dilemma as she could not always make out who was her husband. After staying at his in-law's place for a few days Suraj Bhan thought of coming back home. He asked his wife to accompany him and the wife agreed.



The ghost also followed them. They had covered a considerable distance when they came across a place where the roads were going in two different directions. Suraj Bhan caught hold of her by the arm and pulled her towards the right direction leading to his village. The ghost caught hold of her other arm and pulled her in the other direction. Suraj Bhan got disgusted and he went straight to the king and told him everything and claimed the lady to be his wife. The ghost also claimed the lady as his wife.

The king was very clever. He thought of a plan. He ordered for a water pot with two holes. The water pot was brought. The king then said, "Look, whosoever could go through one hole and come out from the other hole could have the lady." Now it was impossible for a man to pass through such a small hole. It was possible only by a ghost. The ghost squeezed himself and easily passed through both the holes. The king asked him to repeat what he did. The ghost went through the first hole a second time. The king quickly closed the mouth of the vessel and the second hole. The ghost was locked up in the vessel. The king then allowed Suraj Bhan and his wife to go home.

That is why the Hindus in the Himachal region are very particular and avoid performing any function in an hour which is not very auspicious.

THE SAGACIOUS DOG

ONE Loki Pal had borrowed three hundred rupees from Bansi Lal. Loki Pal had nothing to call his own and to pay the debt back excepting a faithful dog. The dog was very faithful and exceptionally good in guarding the house. Bansi Lal kept on worrying Loki Pal to pay off the debt. On being pressed hard for repayment of his loan he gave his dog to Bansi Lal for three years as a pledge. Bansi Lal took the dog and went away.

One day Bansi Lal and his family were fast asleep when some thieves broke open the door. The dog kept on barking but none woke up. The thieves removed a lot of valuables. The dog followed the thieves and found the thieves concealing the valuables in a pit in a thick forest. The dog returned home.

The next morning when Bansi Lal woke up, the dog went near him and pestered him by low bark and made signs to go somewhere. At last Bansi Lal followed the dog. The dog took him near the pit, where the thieves had hidden the booty. Bansi Lal then dug the place and to his utter surprise found the stolen valuables. He was very happy with the dog and was grateful for the services of the dog.

Bansi Lal wrote a letter to Loki Pal and mentioned that the loan has been paid off through his dog. He tied the letter round the dog's neck and sent him to Loki Pal's house. Loki Pal on seeing the dog coming back home thought he had run away from Bansi Lal. Loki Pal came near the dog to take him back and found the letter. He was overjoyed and felt very proud of the dog. He took the dog back but Bansi Lal said as the debt had been paid off, the dog must remain with Loki Pal.

Thereafter Loki Pal lived very happily with his faithful dog.

34

MESSAGE FOR ONE LAKH RUPEES

IN one of the small hilly kingdom of Himachal there was a prince who was not liked by the king. The king banished the prince. The prince cheerfully obeyed his father and went on exile. The prince carried with him three lakhs of rupees.

His journey took him to jungles, lakes and new areas. While going on and on he met a sadhu who was shouting at the top of his voice, "Give me one lakh rupees and take one message." The prince heard this and started thinking what important message would it be that the sadhu is selling it for one lakh rupees. The prince was a little amused but very curious. He called the sadhu and gave him one lakh of rupees and asked him to give one message.

The sadhu whispered to the prince, "My boy, never sleep on another's bed without dusting the bed properly." It was a very simple message. The prince went on repeating the words and learnt it by heart. He asked the sadhu if he has more messages to sell. The sadhu said he could give him two more very useful teachings but would charge one lakh of rupees for each of them. The prince wanted to have them. He gave one lakh rupees more to the sadhu and said, "Give one more message please." The sadhu said, "Never eat at a place where the people are unknown." The prince heard it and learnt it by heart. He gave the sadhu another lakh of rupees and said, "Please give one more message." The sadhu said, "Relatives are yours only when you are rich."

The prince was a pauper buying the messages and continued walking on the street like an ordinary poor

traveller. He reached a thick forest. There was no habitation. There was only a small hut. In the hut was an old ogre who had assumed the body of an old woman. She used to eat human beings. When the old lady saw the prince her mouth started watering. She invited him to her house and gave him all comforts and wanted him to pass the night in her hut.

At night she made a bed for him and asked him to sleep. Just before retiring suddenly the prince was reminded of the sadhu's first message that one should not sleep on a bed without proper dusting. He removed the bed sheet to dust. But to his utter surprise he found that there was a big ditch below. The prince saw through the trick with the help of the thick lantern he was carrying. He killed the old lady and left the hut. He resumed his journey. After coming a long distance he came across another hut. There he found an old lady and her daughter. The old lady came to know he was a prince and wanted to kill him and take away his money. She thought he had plenty of money with him. She served him food. The prince was reminded of the sadhu's second message. "Never eat in a place where people are unknown." As the place was new for the prince he quickly took a piece of *chapati* (bread) and gave it to the cat which was hovering about for food. The cat ate it and died. The prince threw the *thali* (plate) away and went his way. The old woman tried in vain to keep him back.

The prince started walking on and on and reached the town where his sister lived. He sent a message that she should meet him at a particular place. The sister had heard that he had been banished. The prince's sister not only refused to see him but even refused to accept him as her brother.

The prince then realized the value of the three messages. The prince continued his journey.

After a month's travelling he reached a township that had just lost its king. The ministers and the courtiers had let loose the royal elephant to pick up a man who should be crowned. As soon as the elephant saw the prince the elephant sat down and greeted the prince and picked him up with its trunk and put him on the back. Great were the rejoicings of the people that a man who was a prince was found to be their king. He was immediately made the king and lived happily thereafter.

35

BEAUTIFUL DREAM

IN a village there were three foolish persons who were great friends. They used to go out to distant places to earn their living. Once when they were returning home with some money in their pocket it became dark and they had to pass the night in a village inn (*Sarai*). With their money they got some good rice, milk and sugar and made some *Kheer* a portion of which they ate and the other portion was kept by for the morning. (*Kheer* is prepared by boiling a handful of rice in half a litre milk. After the rice is cooked sugar is added and stirred well and eaten after it gets cold).

Before they slept a big quarrel arose. Each one wanted a bigger share of the *Kheer* that was left over. Finally they decided that who-so-ever dreams the best will get the major share of the *Kheer*.

They then went to bed. The first two fools were fast asleep but the third fool could not possibly sleep. He started worrying about narrating a beautiful dream the next morning. When he could not think of one he quickly got up and ate up the rest of the *Kheer*. After that he had a sound sleep.

All the three fools woke up in the morning. They wanted to know each other's dream. The first fool said, "Look ! I dreamt that I had gone to heaven. There was a very nice dance going on to entertain me. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. There were lots of men and women in splendid dress and they all wished me happiness. They offered me a sparkling drink in a goblet. Just when I was going to drink I woke up. Is it not a grand dream ? Should I not get most part of the

Kheer ?" The second fool said, "Wait till you all hear the dream I had." Then he went on, "I dreamt that I had become a king. I was holding a durbar. My ministers were sitting around me and a court singer was entertaining us with a song. Just when he finished the song the dream vanished and I woke up." Then they asked the third fool to say what dream he had. The third fool quickly thought of a dream and said, "I dreamt that a devil had come and was threatening me that unless I finish the *Kheer* he would beat me to death." When the other two fools heard this they quickly asked him, "What ! Have you taken the *Kheer* ?" The third fool said, "What could I do ? I had to finish it otherwise I would have been beaten to death." The other two fools spoke out, "Why did you not wake us up at that time ?" The fool gave a mischievous smile and said, "How could I wake you up ? One of you had gone to heaven and the other had become a king. I could not possibly go near either of you."

The two other fools were not in a position to say anything. They cursed their own fate for not being clever enough in weaving out a better story.

However the three fools had a hearty laugh and admitted to each other that none of them had a dream.

36

SHEILA

SHEILA was a sweet-tempered and beautiful girl in a small village many years back. Sheila was married in a family far away from her village. Her in-laws were many. She had her father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and others. Sheila was very fond of her husband. The whole day she used to work for him.

One day Sheila was returning home with a bundle full of green grass. Her husband called her and said, "I am going out to earn my livelihood." Sheila did not know what to say to her husband. Tears gushed from her eyes. With tearful eyes she bade him farewell.



Sheila's husband started on his journey. Days, months and even years passed. He did not return. Sheila who was very patiently waiting for his return started

blaming her own fate. From morning till evening she tried to keep herself busy so that she might pass her time. But everything reminded her of her husband. Her life became a sort of blank to her.

Sheila's husband never wrote any letter to his wife. Once he thought of returning home. But then twelve years had passed. He thought that his parent might have died and his brothers might have grown old. Regarding his own wife he thought that she might have married another man.

One day all of a sudden thoughts of his home started vexing him. He dressed himself as a sadhu. When he returned to his village it was afternoon. The afternoon sun was just in the sky. He went to his field and saw Sheila working there. He said, "What is your name and what is the name of this village?" Sheila would have scolded him for asking for her name. But as the tradition of the village was to give correct information, she gave out that Sheila was her name and that she was the daughter-in-law of a seth. She also gave the name of the village.

Sheila could not recognise her husband in that dress at all. The sadhu then asked why she was working all alone in the field and where other members of her family had gone. Tears gushed forth from her eyes. But suddenly she pretended to be very angry. At that moment the sadhu said, "Come let us sit under the shade of a tree and talk." When Sheila heard this she said, "Why should I sit with you ?"

The sadhu who had recognised her quietly left the place and went straight to his house. He called aloud the God's name. His mother who was devoted to sadhus came out. She used to ask a sadhu all kinds of questions. She could not recognise the sadhu. She asked him when his son would return. The sadhu said, "I am very hungry. First give me food, then only I will speak."

The sadhu said, "If the food is cooked by your second daughter-in-law then only I will take food in this house." The second daughter-in-law was none other but Sheila. Now Sheila had no mind to cook food for him. When Sheila's mother-in-law requested her to cook she agreed and started cooking. After she finished cooking she served to the guest, on a broad Malu leaf (Malu leaf is usually used as a plate). The sadhu refused to take food and said, "Unless and until you serve food in your husband's plate, I will not take food at all." Sheila, who by now had lost control over herself said, "If you do not want to eat you may go away. Who are you to take food in my husband's plate?"

The sadhu then turned back and fell at his mother's feet and said, "I am your son." Hearing this Sheila turned around and with tears of joy in her eyes recognised him and served food to her husband.

The sadhu then put on ordinary clothes and gave all the riches that he had gained during these twelve years to his wife. Thereafter they lived happily without any more separation.

37

WHICH IS SUPERIOR—WISDOM OR WEALTH ?

THERE were two friends in a village in Chamba valley. One was rich and the other was intelligent. But there arose a quarrel between them. Both claimed to be superior to the other in intelligence and status. They could not patch up their quarrel. The two friends drifted apart on this question. They, however, agreed to have some arbitrators. But the arbitrators failed. They took their quarrel to the minister who also could not come to any decision. As a last resort they approached the king to decide. The king quickly came to a decision. "Let both be beheaded," the king ordered and that was a shock to the two quarrelling men.

The order of the king was a bombshell. Both of them started repenting for their dispute. The wise man turned round and asked the wealthy man, "Dear friend, can you think of any alternative by which we could escape the imminent calamity?" The wealthy man replied, "I am very much perturbed. I am ready to spend the whole of my wealth to save my precious life. What is this wealth if I die?" The wise man said, "Well, if your life is saved will you give me half of your riches?" The rich man quickly replied, "Certainly I will." He put this offer in a letter to the wise man.

This wise man kept the letter. Both approached the minister and requested him to have them beheaded at once then and there. The minister was astonished at this strange request and enquired, "Well, what is the idea? Why are you both so anxious to have your heads go so readily?" The wise man smiled and replied with emphasis, "Sir, since we are destined to die, we must die a pious and cheerful death. According to our scriptures,

an execution for no fault puts the soul straight away in the paradise and it will react and wipe out the man ordering the execution and his posterity from the face of the earth. That is why, we want to die quickly on the scaffolds. Please, Sir, make the arrangement.' The wise man's words made a great impression on the mind of the minister. He thought he must consult the king.

The minister then went to the king and narrated everything to him and begged to be excused from carrying out his orders. The king sent for the two men and asked them the reason as to why they were anxious for a quick execution. The wise man repeated what he had told the minister. He also handed over the letter which the wealthy man had given him.

The king laughed and said, "You are set at liberty and you can go anywhere you please. The quarrel has been set right by you both. The rich man has acknowledged the superiority of the wise man." The two persons were set at liberty.

Both the friends were very happy and never quarrelled again.

38

PANCHU THE ROBBER

MANY songs are still sung in the villages of Himachal Pradesh praising the valour of Musa Saun of village Bamora and the son of Narain Saun and Rikhola. The village bards have kept green the memory of Musa Saun who had killed Panchu, the great robber and a desperate killer.

The people of Bamora and the neighbouring villages did not know what to do with Panchu. Panchu would descend on the village as a cyclone armed with clubs when the menfolk would be away at their fields in the day. Panchu would rob the women of their money and jewels and would also dishonour them. He was a very strong man with the strength of several men and no one could fight with him. If the villagers would stay back Panchu would not come and their ploughing suffered.

There was a young boy, Musa Saun, who developed early into a powerful fighter. He could take several men together and defeat them in a fight. He was an expert in hand-to-hand fight. He said he would take on Panchu and fight with him. His parents tried hard to dissuade him. But Musa would not listen. By doing certain marvellous feats of strength he convinced his parents he could fight with Panchu. At last they were obliged to give him the consent.

Musa went to Panchu's village followed by two men. Panchu challenged them. There was a long fight over several days. The two men with Panchu ran away out of fright and informed Musa's mother that

Musa was killed in the fight. There were pathetic scenes at Musa's village and everyone was downcast that Musa should die.

But Musa came out victorious. After a long fight which covered a few days Musa was able to kill Panchu. Musa came back to the village and his villagers to a man greeted him. His mother did not know what to do. So happy she was. His victory was celebrated in various ways. There were *Pujas*, feasts, songs and dances. Bards from far and near came uninvited, composed songs, sang them to the accompaniment of appropriate music. Some of those songs are still current and sung in the remote villages.

39

SHAH-MUST-ALI AND BHIKU

FOLK-tales on the devotion of some people to God are common. Some of such devotees are still remembered through tales and ballads about them. Bhiku was one such devotee.

Shah-Must-Ali was a devotee of God. Both Hindus and Mussalmans respected him. Shah-Must-Ali had such a miraculous tongue that whatever he would say would come out true.

Bhiku was a disciple of Shah-Must-Ali. He was a Brahmin by birth. He was deeply devoted to his *guru*. During his spare time he used to repeat the name of God. Unknown to his *guru* Bhiku had developed a high godliness in him.

One day Bhiku went out begging in the village. On the way he saw men carrying a dead body.

Bhiku asked the men, "What are you carrying on your shoulders?"

They told Bhiku that they were carrying a corpse to the cremation ground.

Bhiku stood bewildered. He had no idea of death. He did not understand what actually had happened. Bhiku then requested them to explain to him clearly what had happened.

Those men carrying the dead body said that the man had died.

Bhiku then said, "What is it in the man that has died?"

The men could not answer this deep question. Bhiku then asked them to put down the corpse on the

ground. He uncovered the corpse and observed: "Everything is all right in this man. He had got a pair of eyes, ears and hands. All his limbs are intact. Then why do you say that he is dead."

The other man replied, "This man does not move as he is dead. Do you not see?" Bhiku spoke in earnest to the dead man, "Get up or else you will be burnt to ashes in the crematorium."

The dead man got up as if from a deep slumber. All the men who were carrying the dead body were very happy and were all praise for Bhiku.

Gradually Shah-Must-Ali came to know about it. His anger knew no bounds. Shah Must-Ali thought that Bhiku has acted against God's will. He thought of putting an end to Bhiku's life.

Bhiku also came to know that his *guru* was very angry with him. He wanted to hide himself. But his faith in his *guru* and in God did not suffer a bit.

Shah-Must-Ali started running after him. Bhiku also ran. They had covered nearly twelve miles. Bhiku was dead tired. When he turned back he saw his *guru* closely following him. Bhiku had no strength left.

He prayed to the goddess Earth to hide him. It seemed that the goddess of Earth heard his fervent prayers and there was a large crack. Bhiku entered into the crack and the earth closed. Bhiku did not come out again. Shah-Must-Ali saw all this and was stunned beyond any measure at Bhiku's devotedness towards God.

That place where Bhiku had entered into the earth is now famous by the name of Bhikey-Shah.

Bhiku has been idolised in a number of ballads well known in Himachal Pradesh. At Bhikey-Shah a grand fair is held every year where people sing his praise and give offerings. The fair is also well-known for the sale and purchase of animals and birds.

THE SWINE THAT WAS A WITCH

THREE lived an old lady at the village of Kurmachal who had seven sons. Six of the sons of the old lady used to work very hard. Early in the morning they would get up, plough the field, sow the seeds and bring water from a far off lake. They had built a wall around the field to protect the field from wild animals. The whole day they would look after the field. But during night some animals used to graze the field and destroy the crops.

The seventh son, however, never took interest in any house-hold work. He used to leave the house early in the morning, roam about and return only after dusk. He treated his home only as a place to eat and rest. But he was very much interested in hunting. He would go out with his bow and arrows and hunt. He often brought home some wild animals. This went on for quite some time.

One day the old lady told her seventh son, "Look my boy, you should not go about like this. We have got to live on the crops of our field. Why do you not work in the field like your brothers?"

The seventh son replied, "Mother, I am interested in hunting. I feel, working in the field is a tame affair and a coward's job. Ploughing the field is so common and drab and there is no act of bravery involved in that."

The old lady then said, "If you are interested in showing your bravery, why not show it on your own field? Wild animals come and destroy the crops of the field. Why don't you shoot them?"

The seventh son retorted, "Mother, they must be rats or hares. There is no bravery in killing them. I feel humiliated to make them my prey."

The mother kept quiet. The seventh son started with his bow and arrow towards the jungle.

All the six sons decided to kill the animals that destroyed their crops. They built a small cottage in the field. At night they decided to keep a watch on the field by turn. After taking food the eldest brother took a spear and went to the cottage. He kept awake. Till mid-night no animal came. He felt a little sleepy. When he opened his eyes after some time he found a tan-coloured swine grazing and spoiling the field. The eldest brother shouted for his brothers but no one came. At last he took the spear and ran after the swine.

The swine saw the man running towards her. She ran for her life at a great speed. She crossed the mountains and plains and disappeared in a thick forest full of *Deodar* trees. The eldest brother chased her. He was very tired and sat under a tree. He saw a cave. He thought that the swine might have taken shelter in the cave. He got inside the cave. It was very dark outside but inside the cave it was very bright. He saw luxuriant trees and fountains and a lady dressed in a bright red sari. He also saw a big iron gate. He went inside it. He felt as if he had lost his senses. He wanted to run away. As soon as he ran towards the gate, the gate closed with a bang.

When the eldest brother did not reach home all his five brothers started worrying. His mother started weeping.

The second brother kept a watch on the field on the second night. The same thing happened and he was also trapped in the same cave. One by one all the six brothers were caught there.

The mother bitterly lamented and asked her youngest son to search for his brothers.

The youngest son was a very courageous boy. He took his bow and arrow and kept vigil at the field. He saw the same tan-coloured swine. He followed her and shot an arrow which struck the animal. He chased and wanted to bring the trophy but to his utter surprise he found an old lady cutting grass. The seventh brother enquired of the old lady if she had seen the swine. The old lady said, "First, you take out the thorn from my foot and then only I will tell you the whereabouts of the swine."

The seventh brother pulled out the thorn. The old lady said, "You go straight this way. You will come across another lady who will be cutting the leaves of a tree. She will show you the way."

The seventh brother did as directed and found an old lady cutting the leaves of a tree. He asked the old lady to tell him the place where the swine lived. The old lady said, "First of all you put the bundle on my head without the help of your hand."

The seventh brother asked the old lady to sit on the ground. He was very skilled in archery and shot an arrow on the bundle. The bundle was raised and settled on her head. The old lady said, "You go straight. You will come across a thick forest of *Deodar* trees. In that forest you will see a cave. The swine lives inside that cave."

The seventh brother got into the *Deodar* forest and came near the cave. He wanted to go inside the cave. Suddenly his eldest brother shouted, "Please do not come in. If at all you want to come please jump over the front lawn. Do not put your foot there." The seventh brother did as directed. He saw a beautiful lawn and a fountain. The fountain was flowing. He was very thirsty. He went near the water and was just going to drink water. Suddenly he heard the second

brother's voice. He said, "Please do not drink this charmed water even if you are thirsty." The seventh brother went ahead without drinking the water.

The seventh brother saw another beautiful lawn. In the centre of the lawn there was a beautiful marble table. On it were placed some fruits and sweets. He was going to eat as he was hungry. Suddenly he heard his third brother shouting "Please do not touch anything on the table." The seventh brother did not touch the fruits and sweets and walked ahead.

The seventh brother came near a rose garden. He saw beautiful sweet-smelling roses of all shades. He wanted to pluck some flowers. He went near them. His fourth brother said, "Please do not pluck these flowers." The seventh brother desisted from plucking the flowers. He again started walking ahead. He saw a beautiful *Veena** on a table. He heard his fifth brother's voice. He said, "Please do not touch the *Veena*." The seventh brother checked himself and moved forward. He walked for a long time. He saw a beautiful girl dressed in red, sitting on a cosy chair. He went near her. Suddenly his sixth brother spoke out, "My dear brother, you should not touch this lady. She is a witch." The seventh brother gathered courage and took up his bow and selected a sharp arrow. The woman jumped from her seat and quickly turned into a swine. The seventh brother shot an arrow. The swine fell down dead. The palace with all the gardens, fountains and lawns vanished in the twinkling of an eye. All the brothers came out of their captivity. They hugged each other and came back home.

The mother was beside herself with happiness seeing all the sons come back together. She gave a big feast to all the people in the village celebrating the home-coming of her sons.

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**Veena* is a musical instrument having strings. The strings when sounded produces a rhythmical sound.

